

VITAL SIGNS

NEWSLETTER OF THE INTERNATIONAL PHYSICIANS FOR THE PREVENTION OF NUCLEAR WAR (IPPNW)

The bad and the good at crunch time for humanity

Tilman Ruff, Co-President

UN Secretary-General António Guterres reported to the General Assembly in September that "humanity faces a stark and urgent choice: a breakdown or a breakthrough....The choice is ours to make; but we will not have this chance again." (*Our Common Agenda*)

The goal of this year's COP26 UN climate change conference—to halve emissions over the next decade and reach net zero carbon emissions by the middle of the century—is clear. Yet the trajectory of greenhouse gas emissions is still upward. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused about five million recorded deaths to date and exposed deep faultlines of inequity in vaccine access. By mid-2021 only three percent of people in Africa had received any dose of a vaccine. Associated with the pandemic, in 2020 an estimated 124 million people were pushed into extreme poverty, and the number of people worldwide who did not have access to adequate

food increased to 2.37 billion—almost one in three people in the world. Early estimates suggest a possible increase of up to 45% in child mortality because of health service shortfalls and reduced access to food.

In an increasingly climate-stressed world, the number of non-state armed conflicts has increased more than fourfold since 2010, as has the number of armed conflicts involving nations outside the area of conflict—many nuclear-armed—with attendant risks of nuclear escalation. If ever there was a time for nations to collaborate to address the urgent complex global challenges that require cooperative solutions, that time is now.

Yet in relation to nuclear weapons—the most acute existential threat humanity and the biosphere face—our current dire predicament is being made worse. Nuclear weapons modernization continues apace in nuclear-armed states, with conserv-



"The international security situation is now more dangerous than it has ever been, even at the height of the Cold War" stated the Science and Security Board of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists in 2020. This year, the clock remains at 100 seconds to midnight, further forward than it has ever been. Photo: Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists.

atively estimated expenditures of US\$72.6 billion in 2020—an increase of \$1.4 billion during the pandemic. Destabilizing development and deployment of faster, stealthier, more accurate and low-yield nuclear weapons accompany explicit nuclear threats as new arms races pitting the US and its allies

(continued on page 3)

Celebrating Dr. Lown's life and legacy

On 25 September, friends, family, and colleagues of Dr. Bernard Lown gathered from around the world for a virtual celebration of his life and legacy of peace, health, and disarmament. The event, co-hosted by IPPNW and Greater Boston Physicians for Social Responsibility, was live-streamed and subsequently watched by thousands on YouTube.

(continued on page 6)



Founding co-presidents Bernard Lown and Eugene Chazov

HIGHLIGHTS

Webinar on nuclear weapons	2
Affiliates in pursuit of peace	4-5
The Healing Power of Music	6
Profile: Dr. Ruth Mitchell	7
Passing the torch	8



NUCLEAR ABOLITION NEWS AND UPDATES

For more information, please contact Chuck Johnson (cjohnson@ippnw.org)

Eliminating the existential threat of nuclear weapons



IPPNW Chair Ruth Mitchell (top left) welcomes Izumi Nakamitsu, Shakhur Mehta, and Peter Maurer (clockwise from upper right) to virtual ban treaty event on September 30.

As experts warn that we are closer to nuclear war than we have ever been, IPPNW convened a special online event on September 30 with UN Under Secretary General Izumi Nakamitsu, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross Peter Maurer, Vice-President of the ICRC Gilles Carbonnier, and President of Rotary International Shakhur Mehta to discuss the TPNW and other

steps that we can take to eliminate the existential threat posed by nuclear weapons.


The event was co-sponsored by our partners in the International Council of Nurses, the International Federation of Medical Students Associations, the World Federation of Public Health Associations, and the World Medical Association.



ONLINE:

ippnw.org/eliminating-the-threat

Under Secretary Nakamitsu reminded participants that “our world faces multiple global challenges...yet the dangers posed by the continued existence of nuclear weapons must rank among the most urgent of these challenges.” ICRC president Maurer cautioned that “accepting nuclear weapons as an inevitable part of the international security architecture or as a useful tool for deterrence is an indefensible and dangerous logic.”

“Rotary International,” said Mr. Mehta, “has been, since its inception, a champion of peace.” While explaining that the organization itself remains neutral on contentious political issues, “my personal opinion is that Rotary leaders should begin the hard work of convincing fellow Rotarians that there is no cause for disagreement when it comes to nuclear weapons.” 

Rose honoring Setsuko Thurlow planted in Spain

The Setsuko Thurlow Rose, “a rose of hope,” was planted in the Botanical Gardens of the University of Valencia on the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons. This one-of-a-kind rose was cultivated by world-renowned rose breeder Matilde Ferrer in honor of Setsuko Thurlow, a Hibakusha and activist who has dedicated her life to advocating for a world without nuclear weapons. Matilde describes the Setsuko Thurlow Rose as a “beautiful, multicolored rose, delicate in appearance, yet resilient. It does not lose its leaves throughout the year.” This effort was co-organized by IPPNW Co-President Dr. Carlos Umaña, Hibakusha Stories, and ICAN.



Dr. Umaña with Matilde Ferrer, who bred the Setsuko Thurlow Rose.

Crunch time for humanity

(continued from page 1)

against Russia and China escalate, repeating many of the mistakes and exacerbating many of the dangers of the first Cold War.

The incoming Biden administration agreed with Russia in early February to extend the New START treaty for another five years, just two days before it would otherwise have expired. Thankfully, also, talks on nuclear weapons between senior Russian and US officials have survived the first few rounds, though with no discernible positive outcomes yet. The Biden administration's first military budget request at US\$753 billion includes an unconscionable increase and continuation of funding for new nuclear weapons initiated by the previous administration. The recently announced plan by the US, UK, and Australian governments to partner in the procurement of nuclear-powered submarines for Australia undermines the global nuclear non-proliferation regime.

The US Nuclear Posture Review currently underway provides an important opportunity for the Biden administration to change course and set a new direction. At the UN this January, the repeatedly postponed review conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty—like the COP26 meeting which precedes it—provides an opportunity to set a different course to enhance and protect human health and security that is based firmly on the incontrovertible evidence that any use of nuclear weapons would have catastrophic consequences for which no effective response is possible.

This darkening landscape makes all the more vital the bright light of the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), which entered into legal force on 22 January 2021. The next major step in its implementation is the first meeting of States parties (1MSP), to be held in Vienna from 22–24 March 2022. The UN Secretary-General



Dr. Ruff (center) leads the applause as the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons is adopted at the UN on 7 July 2017. ICAN photo


recently called on all states “to recognize the nuclear ban treaty's goals and its place in the global disarmament architecture.”

Newly installed Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, who hails from Hiroshima, said on 4 October: “I believe that the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons is a very important treaty for a world without nuclear weapons.” Governments which have not yet joined the treaty but have signalled their intention to join 1MSP as observers include Finland, Sweden, Switzerland, Norway, and the Marshall Islands. The fact that the TPNW is now international law and is here to stay was even recognized by US Ambassador Bonnie Jenkins, who recently indicated that the US is no longer telling countries that they shouldn't sign the treaty. The TPNW currently has 86 signatories and 56 ratifications, with an additional number expected to ratify before 1MSP.

The Austrian government, which will host 1MSP, is keen to ensure that updated evidence on the health and humanitarian impacts of nuclear weapons and the dangers of their use—the rationale for the TPNW—features prominently. The president designate of the meeting is Alexander Kmentt, Director for Disarmament, Arms Control and Non-proliferation for the Austrian government and a key leader of the ban treaty process. The meeting could hardly

be in better hands.

At 1MSP, IPPNW will continue its fertile collaboration with our international health partners, the International Council of Nurses, the International Federation of Medical Student Associations, the World Federation of Public Health Associations, and the World Medical Association, as well as the international Red Cross Red Crescent movement. We plan an authoritative update on the health and humanitarian dimensions of nuclear weapons dangers to inform government delegations about the extreme urgency of effective action to reduce the risk of nuclear war.

In May, IPPNW formulated a number of recommendations for 1MSP's agenda. Among them are inclusion of people affected by nuclear weapons use and testing in all TPNW meetings; presenting new evidence and developments on the humanitarian impacts of nuclear weapons and the risks of their use; setting up bodies and processes that can continue the work of treaty implementation and promotion between meetings; establishing expert advisory bodies on key topics; encouraging States Parties and signatories to widely share and promote why they believe joining the TPNW enhances the security of their people; and urging all states that have not supported or joined the TPNW yet to participate in 1MSP and subsequent TPNW meetings as observers, and engage constructively with the treaty and the evidence and concerns that underpin it. 

This article is edited and abridged from a longer piece available on IPPNW's Peace and Health Blog.



IPPNW's recommendations for the 1MSP and COP26 are at peaceandhealthblog.com

Canadian youth network pursues peace



Canadian affiliate leaders want their country to join the ban treaty.

Despite restrictions due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, IPPNW-Canada (IPPNWC) has continued its work to actively pursue a world free from nuclear weapons.

IPPNWC has prioritized youth leadership, hiring an innovative young staff including executive director Lia Holla and program coordinator Magritte Gordaneer, collaborating over the summer with youth-led group Mymedia-Creative, mentoring four summer high school interns, and engaging with medical students throughout Canada.

IPPNWC's student initiative has grown into a flourishing network of youth engaging in nuclear disarmament and climate activism. Among a number of activities, the IPPNWC student group and Students for Peace and Disarmament worked successfully with the McGill Student Society to develop policies to oppose harmful military technology and to support the TPNW.



ONLINE:
www.ippnwcanada.ca



**IPPNW Affiliates
Working Globally
for Peace
and Nuclear Abolition**

**A continuing series of profiles
highlighting the work of our affil-
iates and activists worldwide.**

UN PoA at 20— #BreaktheChain of armed violence

Members of IPPNW Nigeria and Nepal brought the message that “guns are bad for health” to the 7th Biennial Meeting of States of the UN’s Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons (PoA) in New York.

During a series of virtual side events, the main way for civil society to participate, members commented on the importance of a public health approach to prevent armed violence. Sessions were attended by Drs. David Onazi and Mansur Ramalan and student Dominic Yusuf of Nigeria, Dr. Bimal Khada of Nepal, and Maria Valenti of the Central Office. The 20-year-old PoA’s goal “to prevent illegal manufacture of and illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons” is largely unrealized with the world awash in more than a billion of these weapons.



Nigerian medical students seek to #BreaktheChain of armed violence.

Climate and peace at COP26 Glasgow

Disarm for Our Planet

COP26 & peace

IPPNW members from the UK and Germany will address the health threats from nuclear weapons, nuclear power, and military emissions at the upcoming UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow, Scotland. "Peace organisations across Scotland and around the world demand action on all forms of conflict and militarism, including a complete end to nuclear weapons. Without this, there will be no possibility of an end to environmental destruction, nor any hope of reducing greenhouse gas emissions to the level we need to stave off the worst effects of the climate crisis," says the Scottish Peace Movement. Glasgow joined the Cities Appeal to support the TPNW earlier in 2021.



Dr. Nalini Kurvey brings her knowledge and decades of experience to IPPNW's work in India.

Doctors in India help prevent nuclear war

Dr. Nalini Kurvey, Secretary of the Association of Medical Women in India, addressed the health dangers of nuclear weapons at the Central Asia Regional Conference of the Medical Women's International Association. Dr. Kurvey and her husband, Balkrishna, are the founders and directors of the Indian Institute for Peace, Disarmament & Environmental Protection, a long-time partner of IPPNW in India. "Doctors have the opportunity, authority, and responsibility to become engaged in this global issue," Dr. Kurvey said.

JPPNW celebrates 40 year anniversary

Japanese Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (JPPNW) will hold a conference to mark its 40th anniversary on 6 February 2022. Keynote speakers include Dr. Masao Tomonaga, former IPPNW Regional Vice President, and Dr. Nanao Kamada who will discuss JPPNW's 40 years of groundbreaking activism. The next generation of JPPNW members, including medical students and young doctors, will join in conversation with young leaders from across the East Asia Pacific Region in a Hiroshima-based symposium. Mitchie Takeuchi, a second-generation Hibakusha and producer of "The Vow from Hiroshima," will join as a guest speaker.



Regional vice president Satoshi Tashiro will help JPPNW advocate for the abolition of nuclear weapons in the years ahead.



NUCLEAR ABOLITION NEWS AND UPDATES

For more information, please contact Chuck Johnson (cjohnson@ippnw.org)


Celebrating Dr. Lown's life and legacy

(continued from page 1)

Prof. Doris Sommer at Harvard University offered personal recollections about Dr. Lown as friend, neighbor, and fellow traveler. Dr. Goodarz Danaei, director of the Lown Scholars Program and the Bernard Lown Associate Professor of Cardiovascular Health at the Harvard School of Public Health, provided a snapshot of the rich tapestry of Dr. Lown's professional life, which coalesced with his determination to rid the world of nuclear weapons.

Dr. Olga Mironova, president of IPPNW-Russia and a cardiologist at the research center in Moscow founded by her grandfather, founding co-president Dr. Eugene Chazov, spoke about the importance of bringing the next generation of students and young scientists into our move-

ment. GBPSR's Sydney Engel and IPPNW co-president Carlos Umaña from Costa Rica teamed up to address the twin existential threats of climate destruction and nuclear war.

At the center of the event were stunning musical performances by a string quartet from the Longwood Symphony Orchestra and by world-renowned cellist Yo-Yo Ma, who weaved together a powerful musical tribute of Bach compositions to honor Dr. Lown and the physicians' movement to abolish nuclear weapons. 



ONLINE:


Full program and list of sponsors at ippnw.org/news/2021-virtual-concert



Yo-Yo Ma paid tribute to Dr. Lown, saying "the work goes on forever...so that we humans can live and survive and thrive in partnership with nature." photo by Jason Bell.

Stepping back from the brink

On 23 September, more than 300 local, county, and state officials representing 41 US states called on President Joe Biden and Congress to adopt five common sense policy solutions to reduce and eliminate the threat nuclear weapons pose to our communities and the world. The letter was organized by Back from the Brink, a national collaborative network initiated by Physicians for Social Responsibility (US) and the Union of Concerned Scientists.


"In our communities there are many life-threatening security challenges related to housing, jobs, transportation, food, health care and other issues that impact real people, our constituents, every day. Nuclear weapons do nothing to address them," the officials wrote. 

IPPNW and Pugwash appeal for US-Russia disarmament talks

In advance of the first summit between Presidents Vladimir Putin and Joseph Biden in Geneva on 16 June, IPPNW joined a group of more than 30 American and Russian organizations, international nuclear policy experts, and former senior officials in an appeal to the two leaders, calling upon them to take steps to reduce "the nuclear risk hanging over the world and to [re-discover] the road to a world free of nuclear weapons."

IPPNW and the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs subsequently welcomed the Summit statement, which proclaimed the "shared goals of ensuring predictability in the strategic sphere, reducing the risk of armed conflicts

and the threat of nuclear war."

"It is important that Biden and Putin reaffirmed the ground-breaking statement issued by Gorbachev and Reagan in 1985 that 'a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought,'" said IPPNW board member Ira Helfand. 

Follow IPPNW on social media



facebook.com/ippnw
Twitter @ippnw
instagram.com/ippnw_central

“Just do what you think is right”

Interview with Dr. Ruth Mitchell

Australian neurosurgeon Ruth Mitchell is Chair of IPPNW's Board of Directors and has been a peace and nuclear disarmament activist since her days as a medical student. We had a chance to chat after one of the many virtual meetings she's been part of during the pandemic.

VS: How and why did you first get involved with IPPNW?

RM: I was introduced to IPPNW as a first-year medical student by Professor Ian Maddocks. He sent out an email saying there was funding for a student to attend the 2004 IPPNW Congress in Beijing, and ever since then I've been hooked!



Ruth with Tilman Ruff at the IPPNW World Congress in Helsinki in 2009.

VS: You served on IPPNW's Board between 2006-2008 as an International Student Representative. How did that experience shape your world view?

RM: I think it was profoundly empowering. I realized I had a role to play at a global level, even as I was starting my medical career, to make the world safer for my patients.

VS: As a young doctor, what was it like to be part of the founding of ICAN in Australia?

RM: I was actually a medical student when ICAN kicked off. I will never forget what it was like to realize I was involved in the beginning of some-

thing really huge. I was in the room when we picked the name, I was there when we decided on the logo, and I remain inspired by the vision that got us started—to build a “groundswell of public opposition” (or GOPO) around the world, to these worst weapons of mass destruction.

VS: You have a large, active following on Twitter and Instagram (@drruthmitchell). Why is social media important to you? What role does it have in our ongoing advocacy?

RM: Social media, above all, is an enjoyable way to connect with people who you can learn from. I think that by being in the mix on Twitter and Instagram, my activism has become more intersectional, more grounded, more respectful of a multitude of diverse voices. And I love being able to share good news, like when a new country joins the TPNW.

VS: Why is advocating for the abolition of nuclear weapons and the prevention of armed violence important to your work as a neurosurgeon?

RM: A big part of my workload as a neurosurgeon is trauma, and once someone has a brain or spine injury, neurological function can be lost, sometimes irreversibly. It makes so much sense to me to be involved in injury prevention, stopping preventable harm before it even occurs. I know that in the event of a nuclear detonation, my hard-earned skills as a neurosurgeon would be no help to my patients or my community. So all we have is prevention, for violence from small arms and light weapons, right through to nuclear weapons.

VS: Earlier this year you became the first woman to serve as the Board Chair of IPPNW. Congratulations on



this new role! What does this position mean to you? What do you see for IPPNW in the coming years?

RM: I'm so thrilled to be able to serve our extraordinary federation in this way, and at the same time I think it's a great shame that it's taken 40 years for a woman to have this position. It's a real honor to be IPPNW's board chair. What I see for the future is an increasingly diverse and responsive board and, indeed, organization. I see us harnessing the power of an increasingly inclusive medical workforce, and medical peace community, to solve the most difficult problems we face as humanity. Together, we can shift the dial on human history. We already have, but there's more to be done. As chair, I need to always be thinking about who isn't at the board table but should be. We need the participation of everyone.

VS: Along with joining IPPNW, how would you advise medical students and other health professionals to get involved in this work?

RM: The best advice was from dear Professor Ian Maddocks, who said “just do what you think is right, don't ask for permission. You can ask for forgiveness later.” I may be slightly misquoting him but the intent was clear. This has stayed with me and guided me. Follow your deepest passions and the way will be made clear. You'll find your people to do the work with.

VS


Passing the torch

On 13 October in Moscow, new and senior leaders from Russian Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War and Physicians for Social Responsibility-US met in person and virtually to "pass the torch" of our four-decade international effort to protect the life and health of humanity.

Russian and American physicians have special obligations as citizens of the two nations that possess approximately 90% of the world's nuclear weapons. At this meeting, the participants pledged to continue IPPNW's essential inter-generational work to eliminate the existential threat posed by nuclear weapons.

"Those of us who remember the Cold War are determined to push forward progress on this issue," they stated. "Those of us who grew up after the Cold War can hardly believe our nations are still threatening each other with weapons that we learned about in history class....As we pass the torch of our activism, we hope the young physicians of Russia and



the United States can help eliminate the nuclear threat and accelerate medical efforts against the new threats to health posed by pandemics and climate change." 

Participants in the intergenerational Moscow meeting included (from left): American co-founder Dr. James Muller, Ekaterina Schelkanovtseva, Olga Perekosova, Regional Vice-President for Russia/CIS Dr. Olga Mironova, Dr. Joe Hodgkin, and other rising leaders of the RPPNW and PSR student movements.

Full statement at
[peaceandhealth-
blog.com](http://peaceandhealth-blog.com)



Give IPPNW to Future Generations

Every year, IPPNW is fortunate to be the recipient of bequests left to us by friends, known and unknown. Remembering IPPNW in your estate plans is one of the best ways to ensure that your support, and IPPNW's critical work to achieve our goal of eradicating nuclear weapons, continues through the years.

For our part, IPPNW has made it a priority to attract, involve, and retain many more medical students and young doctors from around the world. To see our mission through, we must pass the torch to a new generation of physician activists. Many of our older leaders are actively engaged in this all-important legacy work.

If you are thinking of including IPPNW in your final plans and want information, please contact the IPPNW Central Office at 617-440-1733. Note that our legal name and address are as follows: International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, Inc., 339 Pleasant St, Malden, MA 02148. IPPNW is a qualified 501(c)3 tax exempt organization; EIN 042-702-110.

Your donation to IPPNW—by check to the above address or at ipnww.org/donate—will support our progress toward banning and eliminating nuclear weapons. Thank you!

Hiroshima and Nagasaki remembered

To commemorate the 76th anniversary of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, the IPPNW medical student movement hosted an exclusive 48-hour screening of the feature-length documentary, *The Vow from Hiroshima*. The screening was followed by a roundtable discussion with Hiroshima survivor and activist Setsuko Thurlow, the filmmakers Mitchie Takeuchi and Susan Strickler, IPPNW Co-President Dr. Sally Ndung'u, and five IPPNW medical student leaders.



Watch the student discussion of "The Vow From Hiroshima" on YouTube: <https://tinyurl.com/2mw7rj3j>

Medical peace work

International Student Representative Victor Chelashow of Kenya attended IPPNW Germany's 10th annual Global Health Summer School. Victor presented on practical approaches to medical peace work taken by medical students in Kenya. International activists gathered at GHSS to discuss issues facing many local communities around the world. Hands-on lessons encouraged participants to think of practical ways to promote peace and end violent conflict.



Victor with one of his German hosts, Dr. Sabine Pfeiffer.

IPPNW is a non-partisan federation of national medical organizations in 55 countries dedicated to safeguarding health by working to ban nuclear weapons and to address the impact of militarism and war on human health.

All gifts to IPPNW are tax deductible to the fullest extent allowed by law. IPPNW is a non-profit organization registered under Section 501(c)(3) of the US Internal Revenue Code. Tax ID# 04-2702110



Vital Signs is published twice a year by IPPNW.
339 Pleasant Street, Malden, MA 02148 USA
Tel: +1.617.443.1733 || Email: ipnwbos@ipnww.org

IPPNW Staff: Michael Christ, Chuck Johnson, Maria Valenti, Molly McGinty, George Cani; editing and layout: John Loretz

