

Vital Signs

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International
Physicians
for the Prevention
of Nuclear War

Nobel Peace Laureate

The Ukraine crisis could trigger a nuclear catastrophe

The current war in Ukraine has shattered decades of complacency about the perils of a world armed with nuclear weapons and the fallacy that, in the “right hands,” they are a necessary evil to ensure international peace and security.

With the danger of nuclear war between Russia and the West higher today than at any moment since the Cuban Missile Crisis, IPPNW has been marshaling every possible resource to bring humanity back from the brink of destruction.

Prior to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, IPPNW organized an emergency public briefing to warn of how war involving nuclear-armed nations could become a regional and global humanitarian catastrophe. What we did not predict is the apparent suspension of rationality, basic humanity, and regard for international humanitarian law throughout the conduct of this war. Nor did we expect the crisis to immediately escalate to explicit threats to use nuclear weapons.

In announcing the invasion, Vladimir Putin warned that anyone who “tries to stand in our way” will face consequences “such as you have never seen in your entire history.” Three days later he put Russia’s nuclear forces on heightened alert. These were the first of multiple acts of nuclear coercion by Russia. NATO states have been more circumspect about trading nuclear threats, though the Pentagon is doubling down on the proposition that building new generations of the civilization-ending missiles remains humanity’s best hope.

If the current conflict goes nuclear, the medical and humanitarian impacts would be far worse than most people can imagine: millions of people killed and injured, collapse of the global economy, worldwide

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With Covid protocols in place at the UN, Undersecretary Nakamitsu (third from right) receives Nobel Laureates petition from (l to r) Chuck Johnson, Ira Helfand, Ray Acheson (ICAN and WILPF), Michael Christ, Molly McGinty, and John Senior (Avaaz).

One million join call for Russia and NATO to renounce nuclear weapons use in Ukraine

A global petition to reject war and nuclear weapons – signed by more than 1,071,000 citizens worldwide – was delivered at United Nations Headquarters in New York on April 12.

Launched by IPPNW and 17 other Nobel Peace Laureates on the social media platform Avaaz, the open letter calls for “an immediate ceasefire and the withdrawal of all Russian military forces from Ukraine, and for all possible efforts at dialogue to prevent this ultimate disaster.” The petition further calls on Russia and NATO “to explicitly renounce any use of nuclear weapons in this conflict, and ... call[s] on all countries to support the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons to ensure that we never again face a similar moment of nuclear danger.”

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Nuclear abolition news and updates

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

IPPNW students #BikefortheBan

In February, more than 150 medical students in six countries – Germany, Kenya, Nepal, Nigeria, Russia, and Zambia – carried IPPNW's mission to their local communities via regional bike tours. Despite the physical distance between the chapters, all were brought together with one unifying message: **the abolition of nuclear weapons is a public health imperative.**

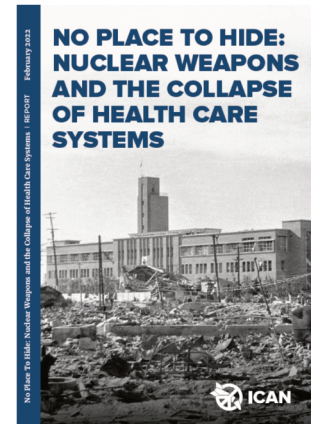
Along the routes, students made their call for a nuclear-weapon-free world heard, wearing "Bike for the Ban" shirts, carrying banners, meetings with decision-makers, and through social media. Students in Kenya were featured on the evening news urging their government to ratify the TPNW. Russian medical students hosted an indoor spin class, with accompanying social media actions, while Zambian students were featured on their University's radio station. In Nigeria, more than 50 students

biked through their university campus (*see page 5*). Medical students in Kathmandu and Simara, Nepal advocated for a nuclear-weapon-free world by hosting a cycle rally around the two cities and connecting with fellow youth groups. IPPNW-Germany students hosted their bike tour on the eve of the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine, declaring "we refuse to be enemies" and calling for an immediate ceasefire.

The events, all on the same weekend, follow a long history of IPPNW student-led bike tours and bold actions for change. We are proud to join the network of youth leaders advocating to abolish nuclear weapons, but we hope future generations will not need to take up the torch. We have a unique opportunity to reject this lethal inheritance, and students have called upon the leaders of these six countries to protect our future.



Zambian medical students biked through Lusaka in February, promoting the TPNW and a nuclear-weapon-free world.



New ICAN report: No place to hide

The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), with assistance from IPPNW leaders in Sweden, the US, the UK, Germany, and France, has released a report entitled *No Place to Hide: Nuclear Weapons and the Collapse of Health Care Systems*, demonstrating that the health care systems in 10 major cities around the world would be overwhelmed by the detonation of just one nuclear weapon.

IPPNW-Sweden has done a separate study of a similar attack on Stockholm. The studies examine access to hospital beds, doctors, and nurses in each city, showing how little medical infrastructure would survive such an attack.

"To ensure the safety of their citizens," the report concludes, "city leaders must call on their country to join the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and take these nightmare scenarios off the table for good."



[More online at
peaceandhealthblog.com](https://peaceandhealthblog.com)

Ukraine crisis

(Continued from page 1)

spread of radioactive fallout, and a nuclear famine.

Publicizing these risks has been IPPNW's priority throughout the crisis. The good news is that major media outlets are more receptive to IPPNW's message than they have been in decades. IPPNW leaders have made numerous appearances on radio and television, including National Public Radio and Russia Today, and have placed scores of articles and op-eds in print media around the world. Engagement with IPPNW social media has spiked from 500-5,000 percent.

We have also mobilized the international community behind our demands for a swift end to the war, an explicit pledge by Russia and NATO that they will not use nuclear weapons in the current conflict, and that they join the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). More than 1,071,000 concerned citizens so far have signed our joint call with His Holiness The Dalai Lama and 17 other Nobel Peace Laureates (see page 1). In March we organized a joint

statement on the war by IPPNW physicians in Russia and Ukraine and another with our international health partners, the World Medical Association, the World Federation of Public Health Associations, and the International Federation of Medical Students Associations.

IPPNW helped to end the first Cold War by fostering an East-West dialogue among physicians. Renewing that work is as important as ever. Today, an intimate group of Russian and American medical students and young doctors continue to meet regularly on Zoom, despite the war. Dr. Jim Muller, one of IPPNW's US founders, joined long-time Russian IPPNW leader Dr. Sergey Kolesnikov in addressing the Russian Academy of Medical Sciences on the eve of the war and the Russian Academy of Sciences after the invasion.

If we are lucky enough to survive this world-wide near death experience, we need to regard it as a wake-up call to dismantle the system of global "security" that threatens to extinguish everything that we love and cherish in this world. The madness has to stop.

Global petition

(Continued from page 1)

Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, UN Undersecretary General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, and Mr. Ioan Tudor, Chief of the Weapons of Mass Destruction Branch for Disarmament Affairs, welcomed the initiative at a meeting with representatives of IPPNW, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), and Avaaz.

The petition is a contribution to our collective efforts to prevent the escalation of this conflict to nuclear war, whether by accident or design; and to contribute to public and diplomatic support for the TPNW.

Russian and Ukrainian doctors find common ground

[Excerpt from a joint statement by IPPNW's Russian and Ukrainian affiliates. [The complete statement is at peaceandhealthblog.com.](https://peaceandhealthblog.com/)]

Russia and Ukraine have been closely connected with each other since the very beginning of their history. It's hard to find a person in Russia who (or whose friends) doesn't have relatives in Ukraine. Both countries are a part of Eastern Europe and share close economic and cultural connections. All these facts make all the doctors feel much more concerned about the current situation in the region. And the most dangerous of all possible threats is, of course, the nuclear one.

[The] use of nuclear weapons would be the final threat to healthcare system and for all of humanity. The time has come to act now and do everything possible...to save the lives of Ukrainian and Russian people.



Passing the torch

In February 2022, Russian student leader Olga Perekosova, and Central Office staff member Molly McGinty met in New York City while Olga completed a short-term medical education practicum. Olga is one of the Moscow-based students leading IPPNW's "Passing the Torch" effort to bring together young health professionals from the world's two largest nuclear-armed states, which are on the verge of a new Cold War. IPPNW remains committed to our founding mission to foster medical and scientific dialogue across ideological and geographic divides.



Olga Perekosova (right) and Molly McGinty in Brooklyn, New York



[Learn more at ippnw.org/rebuilding-the-us-russian-medical-bridge-for-peace](https://ippnw.org/rebuilding-the-us-russian-medical-bridge-for-peace)



International Medical Student Movement



Official partner of
YOUTH for TPNW
calling for a world free from nuclear weapons

IPPNW students take leadership in Youth4TPNW

IPPNW is a proud partner of Youth4TPNW, a new global youth movement pursuing the full implementation of the UN's Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Youth4TPNW will host a youth-led, youth-driven event alongside the First Meeting of the States Parties, (1MSP) in Vienna, 21-23 June. The "Youth MSP" will mobilize, educate, and engage young people from all over the world around nuclear disarmament, giving young people a voice in the first meeting of the Treaty's States Parties. International Student Representative Victor Chelashow and Central Office staff member Molly McGinty serve as co-leads on the network's steering group.

[Learn more at youthfortpnw.net](https://youthfortpnw.net)



Global Health Summer School 2022

Each year IPPNW-Germany, in collaboration with the Charité Institute for Social Medicine, Epidemiology, and Health Economics and the German Platform for Global Health conducts a weeklong immersion workshop for students and young professionals to address major global challenges including climate change, the effects of war on global health, and the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons. This year's program—"Between Ethics and Economisation: Lessons from the Coronavirus Pandemic"—will include relevant theoretical and practical perspectives in the form of collaborative seminars, case studies, skills workshops, presentations, group work, and excursions. IPPNW Europe leaders hope to help organize a summer school in Sztutowo, Poland in 2023. Contact: Laura Wunder (wunder@ippnw.de).



[Learn more at health-and-globalisation.org/summer-school.html](https://www.health-and-globalisation.org/summer-school.html)



Nigerian Students bike in Maiduguri as part of the international #BikefortheBan weekend in February.

More than 50 students #BikefortheBan in Nigeria

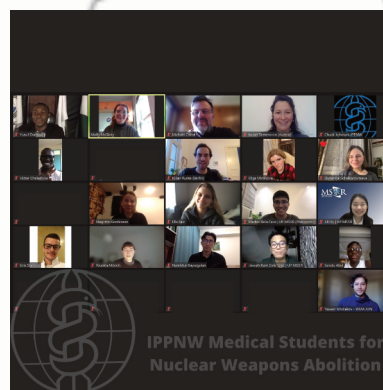
International Student Representative Yusuf Dominic joined the global #BikefortheBan weekend by leading a bike tour around the campus of University of Maiduguri Medical Center. More than 50 students and young doctors joined the tour to celebrate Nigeria's ratification of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. IPPNW's medical student movement looks forward to hosting a bike tour in Vienna this summer. Stay up to date with IPPNW's International Medical Student Movement and follow us on Facebook and Instagram: @IPPNWStudents.



Victor Chelashow (left) at the 2021 Global Health Summer School in Berlin.

Virtual student congress

IPPNW students and young doctors from more than one dozen countries including Mongolia, the United States, India, and Zambia gathered online for the second annual Virtual Student Congress. Participants were joined by IPPNW Co-Presidents, Dr. Sally Ndung'u and Dr. Carlos Umana, who reflected on their experiences as leaders in this international movement and how that has positively informed their work as health professionals. Despite the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, students were able to share the vast number of actions and activities they led in the past year. Stay tuned for more information on our next virtual student meeting, set to take place after the 1MSP.



2nd annual Virtual Student Congress on Zoom



Nuclear abolition news and updates

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

Greek cities endorse TPNW

Support for the ICAN Cities Appeal has soared in Greece in the midst of the Ukraine crisis. In March, after the Russian invasion began, the municipalities of Agios Efstratios, Tilos, Ilioupoli and Agios Georgios were added.

The Central Union of Greek Municipalities (KEDE) subsequently issued a resolution in support of the TPNW. Gavdos, Delphi, Kasos, Gortynia, and Ancient Olympia followed in April.

In addition to these victories, New York City reaffirmed its status as a nuclear-weapons-free zone in December. The city government is one of a select few worldwide that has not only taken the symbolic step of endorsing the nuclear ban treaty, but has committed to divesting its substantial employee pension funds from nuclear weapons manufacturers. If we can make it there, we can make it anywhere!

Civil society speaks out despite NPT Review delays

IPPNW Co-President Sally Ndung'u presented a key portion of a joint civil society statement about the urgent work facing the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference when it finally convenes in August.

After repeated pandemic-related delays, in January civil society groups decided to present a video version of their previously planned joint statement. IPPNW was a co-author of the statement, and Dr. Ndung'u was chosen to present on the humanitarian impacts of nuclear war.



Co-President Sally Ndung'u told NPT RevCon to end nuclear weapons before they end us.

Citing a joint statement released last year by IPPNW, the World Medical Association, the World Federation of Public Health Associations, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Council of Nurses, and the International Federation of Medical Student Associations, Dr. Ndung'u said "ending nuclear weapons before they end humankind and many other lifeforms is an urgent health and humanitarian imperative."

Among other important issues the Review Conference will take up in August are discussion of a controversial proposal by the so-called AUKUS group – Australia, the UK, and the US – to build a fleet of nuclear submarines that will be operated by Australia in conjunction with the other two countries. Such use of highly enriched uranium fuel undermines efforts to discourage nations from stockpiling fissionable materials.

Health organizations call on TPNW Member States to fully implement Treaty's goals

[Excerpts from a joint statement by IPPNW, the World Medical Association, the International Council of Nurses, the World Federation of Public Health Associations, and the International Federation of Medical Student Associations. [The full statement is online at peaceandhealthblog.com.](https://peaceandhealthblog.com)]

Updated evidence on the catastrophic consequences of any use of nuclear weapons...should underpin the work of the upcoming 1st Meeting of States Parties (IMSP) of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). The Treaty concludes – and we concur – that the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons is the only responsible course of action in the face of such consequences.

Since the adoption of the Treaty, new data about climate effects has been published documenting the impacts from both limited and large-scale nuclear conflicts. This evidence should continue to drive the process of implementing the Treaty, its prohibitions, and its positive obligations.

As the World Health Organization has stated, nuclear weapons pose the greatest immediate threat to human health and welfare. The elimination of nuclear weapons is the only way to put an end to this preventable and intolerable threat.

Nuclear war does not have to happen

An interview with Ira Helfand

Dr. Ira Helfand is a retired internist and urgent care physician who has been a leader for more than 40 years in IPPNW and its US affiliate Physicians for Social Responsibility, which he co-founded. He serves on the board of IPPNW and on the International Steering Group of ICAN. Dr. Helfand has published and lectured widely on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons. He presented his seminal report on nuclear famine at the Nobel Peace Laureates Summit in 2012.

VS: How did you first become an activist, and how did nuclear weapons rise to the forefront of concern for you?

IH: I grew up in a Jewish family shortly after the Holocaust, and was taught from an early age that the only thing needed for the triumph of evil was the silence of ordinary people. I was active in the Civil Rights and anti-Vietnam War movements. When, as a medical student, I read about the danger posed by nuclear weapons, I realized that preventing nuclear war had to be our highest priority if we were going to survive to deal with all the other issues that I cared about.

VS: You are a recognized expert and have spoken and published widely on the health impacts of nuclear weapons. Have you found that people are knowledgeable about the issue? What have been the major barriers to education?

IH: People were knowledgeable in the 1980s, but that changed with the end of the Cold War. People stopped paying attention to the threat posed by nuclear weapons. The danger did not seem real – until now.

VS: The medical reality of a nuclear war is so vast it is difficult to comprehend. How do you inform people without leaving them overwhelmed and in despair?

IH: I tell people the key truth about our situation: nuclear war does not have to happen. These weapons are not a force of nature over which we have no control. It is perfectly possible for us to eliminate them and by doing so we can literally save the world.

VS: People ask, “Why are doctors talking about nuclear weapons?” Why do you think the voices of



Dr. Helfand with the Nobel Peace Prize medallion awarded to ICAN in 2017.

health professionals are critical to this effort?

IH: We have always maintained that nuclear weapons are primarily a public health issue. When we speak about this issue we have a credibility that helps people accept the difficult message we are delivering. And we have experience talking to patients about serious health problems that informs the way we talk to the public about this issue. It's not so terribly different than explaining to a patient what's going to happen if she doesn't stop smoking and then working out a plan with her for how to do that.

VS: How has advocating for the abolition of nuclear weapons been important to your work as an emergency care physician?

IH: I think perhaps it is the other way around. Working as an emergency and urgent care doc reminded me every day of how precious and vulnerable human life is, and how important it is that we work to preserve this planet for children and future generations.



[Online: Nuclear famine: two billion people at risk, by Ira Helfand, MD](https://www.ippnw.org/online-nuclear-famine-two-billion-people-at-risk-by-ira-helfand-md)

tinyurl.com/4n4mufap



Dr. Helfand with Austrian ambassador Thomas Hajnoczi at the 2016 UN Open Ended Working Group meeting that recommended commencement of negotiations on a treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons.

First Meeting of TPNW States Parties scheduled for June in Vienna

Despite the pandemic and a dangerous war in nearby Ukraine, the 60 nations that have fully joined the TPNW will convene the First Meeting of States Parties (1MSP) from 21-23 June in Vienna. This milestone event will set the stage for implementation of the Ban Treaty as an effective legal and diplomatic instrument that can lead all nations toward nuclear weapons abolition. The president of the meeting will be Austrian ambassador Alexander Kmentt, one of the key leaders of the Ban Treaty process.

Some countries that have signed but not yet ratified (29 in total currently) will join as observers, along with several others that have not yet supported the Treaty, including NATO members Norway and Germany.

An ICAN forum on 18-19 June will include presentations, and strategy sessions for our future work. In addition, there will be a

“youth track” set to run through the entire week (*see page 4*).

On 20 June, a one-day symposium on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons will be held at the Austria Center. IPPNW has submitted an eight-page briefing paper, including new and updated findings on climate impacts of nuclear war, to the symposium, and has joined with several international health federations in calling for prompt universal ratification and implementation of the Treaty (*see page 6*).

IPPNW members from many countries have registered to attend the pre-1MSP meetings, and as many as possible will observe the 1MSP in person, depending upon COVID restrictions. The 1MSP will be live streamed through UN-TV so those not coming to Vienna can watch the discussions from home. We'll provide full coverage in the next *Vital Signs*.



IPPNW Urgently Needs Your Support

The current crisis in Eastern Europe underscores what we have warned since the end of the Cold War—that nuclear war is still a very real possibility.

IPPNW is here to mount a vigorous response because generous donors like you understand that we cannot rest until nuclear weapons are banned and eliminated.

We need your financial support today more than ever. Our resources are stretched to the breaking point. To press ahead with our efforts to prevent nuclear war and abolish nuclear weapons, we need your donation now.

Your contribution today will help eradicate the greatest immediate threat to life and health the world has ever known. *Please make that gift now by mailing your donation card or by [donating online at ippnw.org/donate](https://ippnw.org/donate).*



The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons was adopted in a packed UN conference room in July 2017. Organizers of the First Meeting of States Parties in Vienna hope for equally strong participation.

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.



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