

17th Global Congress International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW)

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Need blurbs (short) for 3 authors and where and what year they all are

Over the past two decades, IPPNW physicians from many countries have worked together on the unified cause for nuclear disarmament and peace. Finland has been a European powerhouse of ideas and practical policies supporting IPPNW causes from the beginning; and the last World Congress held there was over twelve years ago, just prior to the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1985. It was hence entirely appropriate that the 17th global congress of IPPNW was held in Helsinki in September of this year.

Background

International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) grew from the professional correspondence of two cardiologists in the late nineteen seventies. Dr Bernard Lown from the United States and Dr Evgueni Chazov from the Soviet Union identified a common passion for medicine and humanity that transcended the political climate of the Cold War. In 1980 they co-founded IPPNW to unite doctors around the world in condemning the threat, development and use of nuclear weapons. In 1985 IPPNW won the Nobel Peace Prize for this work. Since the end of the Cold War IPPNW has continued to campaign against the 27,000 nuclear weapons which continue to threaten the lives of millions^{1,11}. IPPNW has also become involved in campaigns against landmines, small arms and for the health of refugees. Medical students have played an increasingly significant role in the organization and now run a number of global anti-nuclear campaigns which are some of the most effective and inspiring projects supported by IPPNW.

The New Zealand Chapter of IPPNW was founded in 1982 and at its peak 1100 New Zealand doctors were members. However, as nuclear weapons have disappeared from public consciousness, membership of IPPNW(NZ) has declined and long serving members have continued their work with little contribution from next generation. Facilitating the development of a medical student chapter of IPPNW (NZ) became a priority and three students were funded to attend the 17th Global Congress of IPPNW in Helsinki from September 8th - 10th 2006. Andrew

Winnington, Catherine Yang, Mohammed Alawami (Saudi funded student) and Rosemary Wyber were honored to attend. We have returned inspired and passionate about the role New Zealand medical students have in creating a nuclear free world and a Pacific free of gun violence.

The Student Meeting

Over one hundred and forty medical students from around the world attended the student meeting, which was held prior to the main Congress on September the 6th and 7th. This was opened by Ayako Okumura, a survivor of the Nagasaki atomic bombing. Her tearful, translated description of the immediate aftermath of the bombings was bleak confirmation of our medical mandate and moral imperative to prevent further atrocities.

This poignant introduction was followed by two days of workshop sessions which outlined IPPNW student projects around the world. One highlight was the Nuclear Weapons Inheritance Project (NWIP); an initiative devised by students who visit nuclear weapon states and meet with other students for dialogue about nuclear issues^{2,12}. Another programme is Refugee Camp Project (ReCap) for international medical students to spend one month in Palestinian refugee camps working with children and providing medical and social support³. IPPNW students also run the One Bullet Stories which presents the experiences of victims of small arms violence⁴. Each of these activities, and the many others, were inspirational and exciting in their own right. It was humbling to realise that they were founded, developed and organised by our peers; with similar demands on their time for study and family commitments.

Prior to the student meeting, twenty students from all over the world gathered in Tallinn to cycle the 880km expedition to Helsinki via St Petersburg, raising awareness of the importance of nuclear disarmament. This received a lot of media coverage and provided a unique bonding experience for the participants. They were able to consolidate within themselves the reasons for supporting IPPNW causes and encourage each other. The group also met with politicians along the way and explained why the nuclear disarmament issue was important to medical students.

Main Congress Proceedings

A vast array of committed humanitarians addressed the main congress. Dr Kgosi Letlape, President of the World Medical Association described war as the longest running health epidemic. He called on doctors to make working towards peace part of our core business, not a task marginalised to a few. Dr Ronald McCoy, Co-President of IPPNW, spoke passionately about developments towards disarmament, including the recent Blix

Report on Weapons of Mass Destruction, the role of the Non Proliferation Treaty, and the growth of military spending under the guise of increased security. The following twenty five workshops were diverse and, at times, overwhelming; peace strategies in the Middle East, health consequences of production and testing of nuclear weapons, medical effects of nuclear weapons, peace in South Asia and a multitude of other topics. Presenters and contributors were doctors who believe that abolishing nuclear weapons - like slavery and small-pox - is possible. The discussions and plenary sessions reflected opinions and experiences from all over the world; and provided considerable insight into medicine outside the narrow confines of our curriculum.

One of the most exciting outcomes from the Congress was the adoption of a reinvigorated¹⁴ [w6]push for a global nuclear weapons convention; International Campaign for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons (ICAN). ICAN has a number of technical components including a second submission to the International Court of Justice, change in NATO policy and nuclear weapons free zones. However, its core component is a global groundswell of information and indignation about the continued threat of nuclear weapons. Public opinion is an essential driver for change in government policy and ICAN provides a vehicle for this to happen. The funding and development of ICAN has been spearheaded by Australian members of IPPNW and it is exciting to think that we are so close to the action^{5,6}. The timeline for ICAN is abolition by 2027 and its vision is feasible within our practicing lifetimes.

The IPPNW Global Congress brought together some of the finest medical minds and peace activists in the world today. Talking to them over coffee and at official functions was incredible and surreal as students from a tiny country on "the other side of the world". We were welcomed, encouraged and included at every event, in part due to New Zealand's unique leadership in nuclear disarmament. We gave a presentation at a workshop about New Zealand's nuclear free status which was exceptionally well received. New Zealand continues to inspire other nations; we are the only country with a Minister for Disarmament and Arms Control and legislation that criminalizes any involvement in nuclear activities. It was refreshing to be surrounded by so many people working for the global good without political or financial incentive.

Since our return from Helsinki we have developed Medical Students for Global Awareness (MSGA). Although MSGA has a strong connection with the nuclear weapons abolition movement our primary interest is in socially responsible medicine. Local groups will be free to explore health issues with implications for peace, equity, population health and development. Nationally, MSGA will provide a supportive environment for students who choose to pursue research interests in related fields, undertake peace campaigns, or participate in global IPPNW projects. We hope that you will be inspired to find out more and become involved and perhaps to join us at the next IPPNW World Congress, which will be held in New Delhi, India from 7 to 12 March 2008⁷.

More information from medstudentsforglobalawareness@gmail.com

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