

The nuclear paradox –threat to global security and peace.

Mr Chairman/Moderator,

Esteemed Colleagues,

Gentlemen of the Press

Distinguished Ladies and gentlemen.

It gives me pleasure to address you at this august gathering of experts, activists, and peacemakers in a Country renowned for honouring and supporting global peace. Our topic — REDEFINING SECURITY: FROM DOMINANCE TO COOPERATION — is not only timely, but essential. The choice between these two paradigms — one based on unilateralism, force, ideology, and narrowly defined national interests; the other based on diplomacy, a search for consensus, and a respect for international law — has rarely been so manifest or so urgent.

As a Physician, and as the Co-President of a federation of physicians that sees peace and care for the human race as one and the same project, I would like to briefly address some of our challenges and opportunities at this crossroads.

The world breathed a sigh of relief at the end of the Cold War, hoping that the annihilation of mankind in an all-out nuclear war between the US and the former Soviet Union was a fear that we could put to rest. Today, however, we find

ourselves once again on the brink of nuclear catastrophe, and we will remain there if we do not take significant steps now toward a world without nuclear weapons.

Despite welcome reductions in their arsenals, the US and Russia still possess more than 20,000 nuclear weapons between them — more than 95% of the world total. There are seven other nuclear weapon states, some in volatile regions of the world. Two of those states — India and Pakistan — have done serious damage to the non-proliferation regime by introducing new arsenals into the world, along with new incentives for others to acquire nuclear weapons. The possibility that terrorist groups may obtain nuclear weapons and use them wantonly is a frightening concern that cannot be addressed effectively without a comprehensive ban on the weapons themselves and the materials with which to make them.

We would be making a serious mistake, however, if we accepted the claim of the nuclear weapon states that this is only a proliferation problem, and that the solution is keeping nuclear weapons out of irresponsible hands, through coercive means if necessary. The nuclear weapon states themselves have moved beyond strictly defined concepts of deterrence against other nuclear-armed adversaries. Some of them openly contemplate preemptive attacks —possibly even nuclear

attacks — against countries they believe to be developing nuclear weapons or the capacity to build them.

The US, the UK, and a handful of allies embarked on an unending misadventure in Iraq, based on unwarranted claims that Iraq was on the verge of acquiring a nuclear arsenal. No nuclear weapons were found in Iraq because none existed. The cost of this mistake in human lives has been staggering: hundreds of thousands — perhaps more than a million — Iraqi deaths; almost 4 million refugees and displaced persons; and more than 100,000 casualties (deaths and injuries) among American soldiers. The five-year occupation has only resulted in a heightened capacity for terrorism and political instability in the region, at a cost of anywhere between one and four trillion dollars. As though these lessons had gone completely unlearned, the outgoing Bush administration has raised global anxiety by sending signals that it might take military action to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons — a possibility that cannot be discounted given Iran's advanced state of nuclear technology, although the country's leaders have denied that they are turning those resources towards weapons development.

Recently, a region with a tragic history of conflict and political instability — dating back to the Ottoman Empire and continuing through the Bolshevik revolution and the radical changes brought about by perestroika and glasnost in

the 1990s — has erupted in violence again. Without going into a discussion here about the causes and claims on either side of the conflict between Russia and Georgia, I only want to point out that in a nuclear-armed world, hostilities that draw nuclear weapons states into confrontations with each other have the potential to escalate into something catastrophic. Peaceful negotiations leading to mutual agreements are urgently needed within this region.

For the past 38 years, since the entry into force of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the nuclear weapon states have avoided their nuclear disarmament obligations under Article VI. Rather, they have striven to maintain a kind of nuclear apartheid — a global security system in which nuclear weapons guarantee the power and status of a few countries, while the vast majority of states must settle for second class citizenship. Israel, India, and Pakistan refused to join the NPT for this very reason, to the detriment of global security.

Just this week, the Nuclear Suppliers Group approved a special waiver that will allow the US to transfer nuclear technology to India, despite the fact that the NSG was created in the aftermath of the 1974 Indian nuclear test to prevent nuclear assistance to countries that were not subject to the safeguards, inspections, and compliance regimes mandated by the NPT.

The dominance paradigm produces the kind of world in which we find ourselves, and offers no solutions for getting out of it — no exit strategy, to use the language of military planners.

IPPNW is a federation of like-minded, non-partisan physicians and health care workers that was formed at the height of the Cold War to address an earlier manifestation of the nuclear threat. Our humble contribution to educating an earlier generation of leaders about the medical consequences of nuclear war was recognized by the UNESCO Peace Education Prize in 1984 and by the Nobel Peace Prize in 1985. Since then we've grown in both size and mission, with affiliate organizations in 62 countries addressing a range of issues related to peace, security, and health.

Yet our fundamental message — that doctor can offer no meaningful medical response to a nuclear war and that prevention is the only responsible option — has not changed. We know that what happened to the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as a result of the US atomic bombings is only a foreshadowing of the consequences of a nuclear war using today's arsenals.

Twenty years ago, we learned that a nuclear war between the US and the former Soviet Union, involving a thousand or more nuclear weapons, would result in a nuclear winter and the end of human civilization. During the past year or so,

scientists have informed us that even the use of 100 Hiroshima-sized weapons could result in tens of millions of immediate deaths and unprecedented climate disruption, including the precipitation of a global famine.

Mounting concern over the nuclear threat and frustration with gridlocked disarmament discussions in UN committees and other arms control forums, prompted IPPNW to launch the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) in 2007. The goal of ICAN is to reawaken public concern about the growing threat posed by nuclear weapons, and to mobilize civil society to demand a nuclear-weapon-free world through the negotiation and adoption of a Nuclear Weapons Convention. We reached such agreements on chemical and biological weapons, on landmines, and, most recently, on cluster munitions. There is no reason, other than political resistance, why we cannot come to agreement around prohibition of nuclear weapons as well.

To do so, however, we must adopt the cooperation paradigm. In the case of the nuclear threat, cooperation must take the form of a courageous and sustained diplomatic effort to create a nuclear-weapons-free world under a Nuclear Weapons Convention. The agreement must be accompanied by good faith actions to implement the Convention and to abide by its terms.

IPPNW launched ICAN at the Non-Proliferation Treaty Preparatory Committee meeting in Vienna, and worked with a coalition of NGOs to bring the Nuclear Weapons Convention to the attention of delegations at the 2008 PrepCom in Geneva. In 2008 and 2009, ICAN activists will make the case that, along with global warming, nuclear war is the greatest preventable danger facing humankind. IPPNW will promote the Nuclear Weapons Convention both inside and outside the UN, and will focus on specific medical issues, including the climate effects of regional nuclear war, the use of highly enriched uranium in radiopharmaceutical production, and the health impacts of an expanding uranium mining industry.

We believe that together with you — our distinguished Colleagues — and with the voices of civil society around the world, we can influence our governments to make the call for abolition their highest security priority, and work with us to make a world without nuclear weapons a reality.

Thank you for your attention.

Dr. Ime A. John

Co-President, IPPNW