

If we are to survive...we must change course

AUGUST 5, 2022

[HTTPS://PEACEANDHEALTHBLOG.COM/2022/08/05/IF-WE-ARE-TO-SURVIVE-WE-MUST-CHANGE-COURSE/](https://peaceandhealthblog.com/2022/08/05/if-we-are-to-survive-we-must-change-course/)

by IPPNW

[Former IPPNW co-president Ira Helfand, on behalf of the federation, will deliver the following statement today at the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference at the United Nations in New York.]

More than 50 years ago the nations of the world, understanding the grave existential threat posed by nuclear weapons, came together in this Non-Proliferation Treaty to stop the spread of these weapons and to commit to their elimination at the earliest possible moment.

For more than five decades, the vast majority of the nations of the world have honored the commitments they made.

But nine nations, including five who are members of this Treaty, have chosen to ignore their obligations. Instead, they have maintained enormous stockpiles of these weapons, capable of destroying modern civilization and killing the vast majority of the human race, and they are all engaged in wildly expensive schemes to modernize and enhance those arsenals. They have continued to gamble with the fate of the earth, holding all of humanity hostage, and, on many occasions, they have brought us to the brink of a nuclear apocalypse.

A recent joint statement with our colleagues from the World Medical Association, the International Council of Nurses, the World Federation of Public Health Associations, and the International Federation of Medical Student Associations underscored the indisputable body of evidence that the consequences of nuclear weapons use are catastrophic, global, and without remedy.

We have not survived because of the supposed wisdom of the leaders of these countries, or the soundness of their military doctrines or the infallibility of their technology. On the contrary we

have survived in spite of them. We are only here because, as former US Defense Secretary Robert McNamara warned us, “We lucked out. It was luck that prevented nuclear war.”

The extreme danger with which we have lived because of the reckless behavior of these nine countries increased further with the Russian invasion of Ukraine earlier this year. In the course of this conflict, Russia has made repeated threats to use its nuclear weapons, and NATO, representing France, the United Kingdom and the United States, has responded with nuclear threats of its own.

In response 18 Nobel Peace Prize laureates issued a statement, which I attach to our message today, calling on both Russia and NATO to pledge that they will not use nuclear weapon in the current conflict. This call was endorsed by more than a million people across the globe and presented here at the UN and to the governments of Russia and NATO.

Their answer—a thunderous silence.

Now these countries are here at this Review Conference demanding again that the other nations of the world renew their pledge not to acquire nuclear weapons while they will not even promise not to blow up the world with the weapons they already have. **They should not be allowed to leave this Conference without making such a pledge.**

And we must go further to hold them to account.

In July of 2017 121 nations came together here at the UN and adopted the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, reaffirming their commitment to the elimination of these weapons and binding themselves anew not to acquire them. Do the nuclear armed states support this new Treaty? No. Led by the five permanent members of the Security Council, the five states bound by this NPT to eliminate their nuclear weapons, they attack the TPNW claiming it is a threat to the NPT. Their attack is nothing more than a brazen attempt to divert attention from the real threat to non-proliferation—their continued failure to eliminate their own arsenals.

These weapons pose an immediate and growing danger to human civilization and they divert our attention from the other great problems that confront us.

We are faced today with a second existential threat— the climate crisis which worsens daily. We are depleting the world's resources, and polluting her air, water and land. We face emerging global pandemics, and our people endure the daily scandal of social, economic and racial injustice that blight the lives of billions.

But rather than attend to these real threats, the leaders of the great powers continue to play a perilous game of “King of the Mountain” to see who can come out “on top” in a global competition for ever more power and wealth, apparently oblivious to the fact that the “winner” of this game will end up sitting, not on a mountain, but on the ash heap that is left of human civilization.

This is not the future that must be. We are not doomed to destroy ourselves in a nuclear war, nor to destroy the environment we all depend on. Nor are we doomed to live on in a world where the majority of our people are denied adequate food, housing, health care and education.

But if we are to survive, and if our people are to enjoy the life to which they are entitled, we must change course. The great powers must understand that their own security, as well as the security of all humanity, demand that they cooperate to address the real problems we face.

And they should start with the most urgent threat of all—the threat posed by their nuclear weapons. The five nuclear armed states that are party to the NPT should enter now—here at this meeting—into negotiations for a verifiable, enforceable timebound agreement to eliminate these weapons, and invite the other four nuclear armed states to join them, so that they all come into compliance with the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and Article 6 of this Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Our survival and the survival of our children demands nothing less.