

International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War 1985

“IPPNW is committed to ending war and advancing understanding of the causes of armed conflict from a public health perspective.”

Background Information

“The bell of Hiroshima rings in our hearts not as a funeral knell but as an alarm bell calling out to actions to protect life on our planet.” These words came early in the Acceptance Speech of Dr. Yevgeny Chazov, speaking on behalf of the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW), on the occasion of the organization’s reception of the 1985 Nobel Peace Prize. Dr. Chazov’s words convey not only the urgency of responding to a critical historical event but the inspiration for the ongoing **advocacy** of a world free from nuclear weaponry.



Yevgeny Chazov, noted **cardiologist** and member of the U.S.S.R. (now Russian) Cardiological Center was a co-founder of IPPNW, in 1980, along with Dr. Bernard Lown, a famed cardiologist with the Harvard School of Public Health. From its formation, IPPNW has bridged political and **ideological** divides, dramatically increasing its membership to 145,000 physicians by 1985. The inception of the organization took place at a time when the Cold War had the world split into two armed camps, each controlling thousands of nuclear warheads and each trying to restrain the other with threats of “mutually assured destruction” (MAD). An exchange of letters between Drs. Chazov and Lown in which they shared common concerns, led to a meeting in Geneva in 1980 which included two additional physicians from the U.S.S.R and two from the U.S.

After two days of discussions, the six doctors emerged unanimous in their support for a wide-ranging organization of physicians dedicated to the prevention of nuclear war. They came to **consensus** around four major points, which continue to serve as foundational elements for the IPPNW:

1. IPPNW would be focused on nuclear war
2. IPPNW physicians would work to prevent nuclear war as a consequence of their professional commitments to protect life and preserve health
3. IPPNW would involve physicians from around the globe and would seek to circulate the same factual information about nuclear war everywhere
4. Though IPPNW might advocate certain steps to prevent nuclear war, the organization would not take a position on specific policies of any government

The International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War has its main office in Boston, Massachusetts and a European office in London. Each year, since 1981, an annual World Congress has been held to update and encourage members about the research and progress being made toward the goals of preventing nuclear war and

1980

- Co-founders were cardiologists, Dr. Yevgeny Chazov of Russia and Dr. Bernard Lown of the United States
- Prevention of nuclear war and reduction of nuclear arms are the main objectives of the organization
- IPPNW had great influence on the creation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaties
- IPPNW has expanded in membership and has added new goals to reduce violence worldwide
- *“We were among the first to demolish the nuclear illusions that existed and to unveil the true face of nuclear weapons...”*
Y. Chazov

eliminating nuclear weapons. The organization remains committed to presenting its findings based on the light of reason and solid scientific data.

In the early years of the organization, IPPNW members used their extensive research to provide politicians and public alike with a realistic picture of a nuclear war and its aftermath. In many ways the statistics showed that concepts like arms race, **deterrence**, limited nuclear war, theater nuclear weapons, first strike, and space shield were dead-end ideas. These were made **moot** by the stark **logistical** reality of a nuclear confrontation. The earth would never be the same after such a conflict and, indeed, it may not be able to sustain life. This latter idea makes the cause for which IPPNW is working one that unifies all of humankind.

In the Nobel Peace Prize Presentation Speech, given by Nobel Committee Chairman, Egil Aarvik, on December 10, 1985, he drew attention to several contributions that IPPNW had made in its short existence. He pointed out that, since nuclear war is an issue of life and death for the entire human race, it was commendable that IPPNW members cited

the **Hippocratic Oath** which requires physicians not to compromise on the protection of life and health. Thus, they had no choice but to demonstrate how the use of nuclear arms would cause unbelievable suffering and death within the borders of the **belligerent** nations, carnage that would overwhelm appropriate medical care providers. Moreover, the residual effects of the unleashing of such firepower would create an “Atomic Winter” that would threaten all living beings the world over.

In addition to drawing a clear picture of the results of business as usual in international relations, IPPNW was cited for raising the issue of the effect that more and more armaments had on national budgets. The organization posed the question of what would have resulted if only a portion of the trillions of dollars spent on nuclear weapons had been diverted from the military to health, education, and other developmental causes. The Nobel Committee acknowledged the IPPNW for doing the work behind the issues and elevating the consciousness of people around the world and their leaders to the importance of the task before them. In his speech, Mr. Aarvik said the IPPNW’s

“contribution to an increased public opposition to the continued arms race can only be seen as a contribution to the cause of peace.”

Today, though **Cold War** tensions are seemingly at an end, the threat posed by the use of nuclear weapons may be as bad as ever. Some nations still have missiles on hair-trigger readiness, still aimed at targets that were set in the 1960's and 1970's; this does little to reduce the danger of a computer malfunction or human error in setting off an unfortunate chain of events. The acknowledged members of the “nuclear club” of nations has grown along with the number of nations that possess nuclear capability but have not publicly acknowledged it. In addition, the potential of nuclear technology falling into the hands of nationalist, religious, or terrorist organizations has increased and so, naturally, has the insecurity of the world.

The work of IPPNW is far from over. The organization retains the abolishment of nuclear weapons as its highest priority and a campaign is under way for a nuclear free 21st century. IPPNW sponsors a *Dialogues With Decision-Makers* program to continue the work of educating policy-makers about the reality of the use of nuclear weaponry. Physicians and medical students are evaluating regional and local preparedness programs and response mechanisms, established to confront a nuclear detonation. They are also having dialogues with leaders in potentially **incendiary** areas of the world such as North Korea and India and Pakistan. Medical student members of IPPNW are disseminating information to grass roots organizations and other students about the current state of affairs and the terrible risks the world faces. The organization is pressing for international adherence to the **Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty** and to the adoption of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.

IPPNW has added two objectives for its member physicians and the people of the world. The “*Aiming for Prevention*” campaign seeks to reduce and prevent injuries and death from small arms violence, especially in the Global South. Approaching this as a public health issue, the organization seeks to assist in the creation of national and international policies to curb such violence and its negative results. The “*Peace Through Health*” program explores ways that health interventions in actual and potential war zones may aid the cause of peace. IPPNW is steadfast in its belief that human beings are capable of creating and sustaining peace, that understanding and commitment to the common cause can free the world of the threat of violence and mass destruction. This hopeful outlook is a reminder of the words of Dr. Bernard Lown in his Nobel Acceptance Speech in 1985, “The reason, the creativeness, and the courage that human beings possess **foster** an abiding faith that what humanity creates, humanity can and will control.”

Suggested Classroom Activities – International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War

Introduction/Warm-Up:

The teacher will make a visual list from student responses to the question, “*Name something that is a threat to the entire world?*” Nuclear armaments may or may not make the list but the concept of world-wide jeopardy would be a jump-off point to the inspiration for IPPNW and the additional areas of concern the organization is working on today.

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the “Cold War”? What brought about this state of affairs? (Level 1)
2. Discuss the concepts of “deterrence”, “mutually assured destruction”, and “space shield”. (Level 1)
3. What was the state of the Cold War in the early 1980’s? (Level 1) What were the policies of the Reagan administration for dealing with the Soviet Union? (Level 1) Describe the effects of these policies. (Level 2)
4. IPPNW believes physicians are vital to the cause of raising public awareness around the issues of violence and nuclear weapons. Why does the organization hold this view? (Level 2)
5. IPPNW received the Nobel Peace Prize after only five years of existence. Did the organization deserve such recognition? (Level 3)
6. Assess how the “end” of the Cold War has changed the mission of IPPNW? (Level 3)

Vocabulary:

advocacy
cardiologist
ideological
consensus
deterrence
logistical
moot
Hippocratic Oath
belligerent
Cold War
incendiary
foster
Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

Activity:

Overview – In his Nobel Lecture, Dr. Yevgeny Chazov said that physicians had a duty, according to the Hippocratic Oath, to warn patients of potential hazards to individual and community health. Thus, in his mind, IPPNW is doing its duty by informing the world of the dangers of nuclear weapons and, currently, of other dangers as well. Is this a proper role for a physician? What are the positive and negatives of taking on such large responsibilities?

Objectives – By participating in this activity, students will:

- practice analytic reading skills as they examine primary and secondary sources
- develop rational arguments on both sides of a question
- practice collaborative learning skills
- defend one position as part of a group debate session in class
- reflect on and write in support of their own positions on the issue under consideration

Procedures -

1. It will be assumed that the students have received some background about the time period, have read the background information on IPPNW, reviewed the vocabulary, and discussed the questions with the teacher.
2. Students will be guided by the teacher through a reading of a current version of the Hippocratic Oath.
3. Students will browse the web site of IPPNW at www.ippnw.org , gathering information.
4. Students will be asked to read the most current edition of “Vital Signs”, the newsletter of IPPNW. This can be assigned from the web page or the teacher may provide a hard copy.
5. Students will be broken into two groups, pro and con, concerning the statement, “*Under the terms of the Hippocratic Oath, the IPPNW is fulfilling its solemn duty in bringing current threats to world health to our attention and the attention of national leaders.*”
 - a. Each group will work collaboratively to formulate the ideas which will defend the respective positions.
 - b. Each group will be prepared to have representatives speak in a debate forum, within guidelines and timeframes established by the teacher.
6. For homework, each student will submit a one-page, written summary of his/her own opinion on this issue and the reasons why he/she believes that way.

Technology Option:

1. In order to learn more about nuclear weapons, their use, their current status, take a “nuclear test”, etc go to www.slmk.org and click on “Learn About Nuclear Weapons”.
2. Go to the site http://nobelprize.org/educational_games/peace/nuclear_weapons/index.html and play the “*Peace Doves Game*”.

Resources:

www.betterworldheroes.com

www.brook.edu/fp/projects/nucwcost/schwartz.htm

www.ippnw.org

www.ippnw-students.org

www.nobelprize.org

www.slmk.org