



IFMSA

International Federation of
Medical Students' Associations

IFMSA Policy Statement

Abolition of Nuclear Weapons

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Summary

Nuclear weapons are the most destructive weapons ever constructed. Not only do they inflict massive and lethal damage to large areas - one bomb alone potentially killing hundreds of thousands - they also pose a threat to the environment and to human health for generations after their detonation.

As of 2014, nine countries together possess an estimated 16,400 nuclear weapons [1]. These weapons are unable to discriminate between military and civilian targets, and pose a threat to civil society both in peace and in wartime.

The IFMSA calls for the abolition of nuclear weapons.

Background

Invented almost 70 years ago during the Second World War, nuclear weapons continue to be the most dangerous weapon created by man. The horrific destructive capabilities of nuclear weapons were demonstrated with the 1945 bombings of the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Estimations of the death tolls suggest that 200,000 people died immediately after or from wounds inflicted by these bombings in 1945, and that more than 400,000 additional lives have been lost since the end of the Second World War as a direct result of the use of these devices [2].

Although only having been used in wartime twice, nuclear weapons were at the centre of the more than four decade long Cold War, involving two super powers competing in a struggle to possess the largest arsenal of nuclear weapons. During these years millions of people lived with a constant fear of a full-scale nuclear war.

Since the end of the Cold War more countries have acquired nuclear weapons. Today the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, China, India, Pakistan and Israel together possess more than 16,000 nuclear weapons [1] - about 2,000 of these being ready to launch within few minutes [3].

All these states are currently involved in wars and/or armed conflicts. Even though the use of nuclear arms in war has not happened since WWII, their continued existence means a continued threat to the civil population of the countries in conflict with the nuclear arms powers. If detonated over a major city, a single nuclear warhead could kill several hundreds of thousands, possibly millions, of people [4].

The destruction caused by the detonation of a nuclear weapon is not limited to the immediate impact of the bomb's explosion. Damage caused by the immediate radiation exposure continues to cause deaths and disease in the weeks, months and years following a nuclear strike. Fires,



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building collapses and the destruction of important infrastructures add to the death tolls in the short term after the detonation, while the radiation makes it impossible to deploy an adequate humanitarian response.

In the close to 70 years that have passed since the detonation of the bombs over Japan, the World's nuclear weapons have only become more powerful, increasing their destructive potential. Following popular movements and demands, arsenal growth has often declined and there has been a reversal of this growth on a global scale.

In recent years, however, the reduction has slowed down – nearing a halt. A small number of countries are still armed with several thousands of nuclear weapons and more countries are hosting nuclear arms and/or are in military alliances with the nuclear weapon states [1]. Despite the obligations for non-proliferation and disarmament set forward in the Non-Proliferation Treaty [5], countries are engaged in a seemingly open-ended modernization of their arsenals [1].

The populations of the countries owning nuclear arms are not safe from these weapons either: There are several documented cases of accidents which came close to causing the detonation of nuclear weapons during their transportation over populated areas [6]. There is possibly no other example in which a human mistake can have as devastating consequences as in the case of the handling of nuclear weapons.

Nuclear weapons were developed in a time of wars between countries, where massive bombings of both military and civilian targets were common. Nuclear weapons are less than ideally suited for modern warfare, where the nature of armed conflicts has changed. Carpet-bombing is rarely seen as a justifiable method, with increased respect for human life and the movement of armed battles away from the battlefields and into populated areas.

In respect of human life, and to protect civilian life and health, nuclear arms should be abolished. In the same way that the World's society has moved to ban chemical, biological weapons, landmines and cluster ammunition, so too should we work to achieve a global ban on nuclear weapons.



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Policy

IFMSA therefore:

- 1) Reaffirms its position: nuclear weapons should be abolished worldwide.
- 2) Endorses the efforts of The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) and The United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA).
- 3) Calls for governments to implement the UN Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT)
- 4) Calls for governments to negotiate and implement binding treaties for the disarmament of nuclear weapons, with a target of their total abolition.

References

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 - 2) "Achieving nuclear-weapon-free world is possible, Ban tells Hiroshima ceremony", UN News Centre, 6 August 2010 (<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=35546#.U5eEgxYq6TA>)
 - 3) Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2013). "SIPRI Yearbook 2013: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security. Summary". Oxford University Press: Oxford. See: <http://www.sipriyearbook.org>
 - 4) Information Sheet "Health Protection Guidance in the Event of a Nuclear Weapons Explosion"; WHO/RAD, February 2003
 - 5) Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), United Nations 1968, available at <http://www.un.org/disarmament/WMD/Nuclear/NPTtext.shtml>
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