



International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War Canada

We are committed to the abolition of nuclear weapons, the prevention of war, the promotion of non-violent means of conflict resolution and social justice in a sustainable world.

President's Letter

Dr. Jonathan Down

March 2020

Our world has turned upside down in just a few weeks. The COVID-19 virus is the greatest disease threat in a century. We hope you and your loved ones stay safe and well. We are in this together and we appreciate our special privilege of life in Canada.

We are deeply grateful to the frontline workers in our healthcare system: our colleagues, nurses, aides, technicians, secretaries, cleaning and dietary staff. We are also grateful for those providing essential services in grocery stores, pharmacies, transportation and all the invisible jobs that keep the lights on and our society functioning. We know you are putting yourselves on the line, and that many of you are exhausted.

As President of IPPNW Canada, I had planned an enthusiastic letter to tell you of our engagement with high schools and medical students, and our success in meeting with municipal councils to sign the Treaty to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons. All of those projects are now on hold

Some commentators compare this crisis as a war, but we do not see it as war. Using the war metaphor gives traction to the notion that more military equipment is needed to save us from COVID-19 virus. War is the deliberate killing of one group of people by another. Instead we need to see it as a challenge to healing. The collaboration of scientists and teams of health care providers working together against time to save lives is not akin to aggression. This global effort is one of unity in the face of calamity. We ask everyone to support their local health workers and to follow the requirements of our public health officials to protect as many people as possible from the virus. We will get through this together.

Across the country, people are rising up and working together to support the weakest members of their communities. We see them volunteering to help the elderly and the infirm who need groceries and medications picked up, to help care for children so their parents can work in essential services. We hear musicians performing free concerts online to bring us together and keep our spirits up. We see people offering help regardless of religion or race or ethnicity.

Being isolated at home gives us unexpected insights into the differences between our real needs and the luxuries we thought were important just a few weeks ago.

We must not minimize the suffering and loss we face ahead, but we need to recognize that the pandemic will end and we will have to address the weaknesses of our economic system, employment, education, and the governance of our country.

Two things are happening at once: the collapse of many of the institutions we have always relied on, and the building of a new global civilization through cooperation and trust growing as we face a common threat.



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Medicine has much to offer in providing a vision for the future. In medicine we speak of the social determinants of health: stable income, employment and working conditions, education, childhood experiences, physical environments, social supports, healthy behaviours, and access to health services. Almost all of these are affected by this pandemic. As we restore our society in the aftermath of this devastating upheaval, we must guarantee international peace or restoration will be impossible.

For decades, IPPNW doctors have studied the characteristics of peaceful communities and how to build on those strengths. We need compassion, honesty, integrity and determination to build a society that supports the determinants of good health.

IPPNWC is updating our Peaceful Childhoods Kit to help parents, teachers, doctors and support workers in the community, to address the needs of children experiencing loss, instability, and fear. Refugees, migrants and indigenous children need special support and help from communities. IPPNW Canada will focus on how we can sustain healthy and peaceful communities.

Building trust between nations is essential because we know how dependent we are on each other. The mutual trust between President Reagan and President Gorbachev led to major steps in nuclear disarmament. Civil Society played a major part in citizen diplomacy between the East and West before their talks. In fact, IPPNW won the Nobel Peace Prize for that work. We must strengthen our commitment to our peace-building role and reject arguments that increase hatred and exclusion.

In the difficult time ahead we will use this website to post articles and our vision for a peaceful world that can more effectively prevent another pandemic. We invite you to join us as Active Members and participate in our Zoom conferences on our role in working toward healing our planet.

Warm regards,

Jonathan Down, FRCP(C).