**PROMOTE HEALTH,  NOT NUCLEAR WEAPONS**

*Medical professionals owe it as ethical duty*

Dr Arun Mitra – Co President

International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW)

Despite ongoing tensions in various parts of the world, the year 2017 ended with a positive note. The Treaty Prohibiting Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) passed by the UN General Assembly on 7th July 2017 (1) ) would always be counted in red letters in history. It has raised many hopes for a better future of a world without nuclear weapons and impending humanitarian catastrophe. Good health is a basic urge of every individual. Therefore each person  yearns for life free of violence and more so when it comes to catastrophe like the one that happened at Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 killing over two hundred thousand people and the resulting genetic mutations affecting generations thereafter. Unfortunately instead of working for nuclear disarmament the world moved towards an unending nuclear arms race, spending billions on it, which could have otherwise been utilized for healing millions of people living in despair and sickness. That is why on 10th December 2017, Oslo, the capital of Norway, was filled with exciting events when the Nobel Peace Prize for this year was bestowed upon (2) ) the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN). Large number of medical professionals from around the globe had gathered there to affirm their commitment for a healthy future through diversion of wasteful expenditure from nuclear arms race to health.

 The ICAN formed at the initiative of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) in 2007 with 468 partners has been consistently working since long for a nuclear weapon free world. The ICAN was officially launched in Vienna, Austria in April 2007 during the Non-Proliferation Treaty preparatory committee meeting. As a result of continuous work since then in the form of lobbying with governments in many countries and public opinion building  by the ICAN partners in respective countries,  the UN General Assembly passed a resolution on 7th July 2017 by 122 votes in favour and only one against which  declared nuclear weapons illegal (3) ). This is indeed a big achievement which drew global attention and was recognized by the Nobel Peace Prize Committee who announced that ICAN to be the recipient of this year's prize. Major thrust of the ICAN was the catastrophic humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons and thus necessity to prohibit and then abolish them. (4) )

When hundreds of millions of people across the globe go hungry, the nuclear-armed nations spend close to US$300 million (Rs.2000 crores) a day on their nuclear forces (5) ). The production, maintenance and modernization of nuclear forces diverts vast public resources away from health care, education, climate change mitigation, disaster relief, development assistance and other vital services. Globally, annual expenditure on nuclear weapons is estimated at US$ 105 billion – or $ 12 million an hour (6) ). The World Bank forecast in 2002 (7) ) that an annual investment of just US$ 40–60 billion, or roughly half the amount currently spent on nuclear weapons, would be enough to meet the internationally agreed goals on poverty alleviation. Nuclear weapons spending in 2010 was more than twice the official development assistance provided to Africa and equal to the gross domestic product of Bangladesh, a nation of some 160 million people. The Office for Disarmament Affairs – the principal UN body responsible for advancing a nuclear-weapon-free world – has an annual budget of $10 million, which is less than the amount spent on nuclear weapons every hour.

*“The world is over-armed and peace is under-funded …. The end of the cold war has led the world to expect a massive peace dividend. Yet, there are over 20,000 nuclear weapons around the world. Many of them are still on hair-trigger alert, threatening our own survival.” – United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.*

Annual Global Defense Expenditure is 1699 billion (2.2 % of the global GDP). US tops the defense expending – 611 billion USD. China defense expending – 215 billion. India is the biggest of buyers of arms (8) )

Indian is 5th largest military expender with outlay of 55.9 billion USD (Rs.363350 crores) (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) annual report April 2017). (9) ) India defense expenditure 1.62 % of GDP. Central health budget of India is 0.26 of GDP which is 6 times less than the arms budget. Pakistan’s spending are equivalent

These studies clearly indicate the threat looming large over mankind at a time when several parts of the world have serious conflict zones and there is direct involvement of nuclear weapons states in many of these conflicts. Any use of nuclear weapons intentionally, unintentionally or by accident would have extremely grave ramifications on the life system as a whole. Even in the situation of not using these weapons, their production and maintenance cost are depriving large population of health, education and other basic needs. For countries like India and Pakistan, situation is even graver as we are already one among the most deprived regions in the world with poor human development and hunger indices. India with a glorious past of promoting non-violence should take lead and convince other nuclear weapons possessing countries to join the treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons and then make a concrete plan to abolish these weapons.

It is unfortunate that the nuclear weapon possessing countries have not joined the treaty. It is high time that we come forward to build strong public opinion in these countries to work for health instead of mutually assured destruction. The doctors owe special responsibility in this case as it is our ethical, professional and moral duty to prevent war and violence.

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