



International Physicians
for the Prevention of Nuclear War

Medical Appeal for a World Without Nuclear Weapons

The time has come to negotiate a Nuclear Weapons Convention

January 20, 2008

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500
USA

President Dmitri Medvedev
Ilinka Str, No 23
103132, Moscow
Russia

Dear Presidents Obama and Medvedev:

For more than 60 years the threat of nuclear annihilation has hung over humanity. We write to you now with great hope that you will seize the opportunity created by your recent elections to address definitively this gravest threat to human survival.

The United States and Russia continue to possess enormous arsenals of nuclear weapons originally built to fight the Cold War. If these instruments of mass extermination ever had a purpose, that purpose ended 20 years ago. Yet the US and Russia still have more than 20,000 nuclear warheads. Most dangerously more than 2,300 of them are maintained on high alert status. They are mounted on missiles and can be launched in a matter of minutes, destroying cities in each other's countries a half hour later. A study published in 2002 showed that if only 300 of the weapons in the Russian arsenal attacked targets in American cities, 90 million people would die in the first half hour. A comparable US attack on Russia would produce similar devastation. Furthermore, these attacks would destroy the entire economic, communications, and transportation infrastructure on which the rest of the population depend for survival. In the ensuing months the vast majority of people who survived the initial attacks in both of your countries would die of disease, exposure, and starvation.

But the destruction of Russia and the United States is only part of the story. An attack of this magnitude would lift millions of tons of soot and dust into the upper levels of the atmosphere blocking out sunlight and dropping temperatures across the globe. In fact, if the whole of your strategic arsenals were involved, average surface temperature would fall to levels not seen on Earth since the depth of the last ice age 18,000 years ago. Agriculture would stop, ecosystems would collapse, and many, many species, perhaps even our own, would become extinct.



Even a limited war involving only 100 Hiroshima-sized bombs would cause enough climate disruption to provoke a global famine that we have reason to fear could kill up to one billion people. Such a war might involve other nuclear weapons states, such as India or Pakistan. This finding underlines the urgency of getting all nuclear weapons states to renounce their nuclear arsenals. It also underlines the urgency of "getting to zero" — eliminating all of your nuclear weapons, since even 50 weapons in each of your arsenals would pose a threat to the entire globe.

We therefore call on you, as the leaders of countries which possess more than 95% of the world's nuclear weapons, to meet your obligations under Article VI of the Non Proliferation Treaty by committing the US and Russia to a Nuclear Weapons Convention that will abolish all nuclear weapons, and by immediately initiating negotiations with the other nuclear weapons states to conclude such a treaty.

Make no mistake — you have the power to end the nuclear weapons era once and for all. With this power comes an awesome responsibility. You face many urgent crises at this difficult moment, but they all pale in comparison to the need to prevent nuclear war. There have been a few other times during the nuclear era when it might have been possible to abolish nuclear weapons, but we failed to act. The current moment may be our last chance. A thousand years from now no one will remember most of what you will do over the next few years; but no one will ever forget the leaders who abolished the threat of nuclear war.

Few in history are given the chance to do great good. You have been given the opportunity to save the world. Please do not fail us.

SIGNATURE

PROFESSIONAL TITLE AND AFFILIATION
(FOR IDENTIFICATION PURPOSES ONLY)