

Science for Peace

December 18, 2023

President's Column



Dear members of Science for Peace,

This year has been a difficult one for peace and climate activists. The war in Ukraine has continued unabated, including the veiled threats of the use of nuclear weapons by the Russian leadership. This year also saw the beginning of the war in Gaza, initiated by the horrific crimes by Hamas, followed by the devastating Israeli bombing of the civilian population of Gaza. By December 13, more than 18,000 people had been killed, including 12,500 children and women. These wars, in addition to other military conflicts and civil wars, such as those in Sudan, Armenia and Yemen, have triggered a dramatic surge in global arms production and sales. According to a recent article in the New York Times, in 2022 worldwide military spending hit \$ 2.2 trillion USD, the highest level in inflation-adjusted dollars since at least the end of the Cold War. As of last year, the United States generated about 45 percent of the world's weapons exports, nearly five times more than any other nation. That is up from 30 percent a decade ago. This enormous military expenditure benefits a few US large corporations and military contractors. For example, Lockheed Martin in the past two years has secured sales agreements worth as much as \$ 50 billion for its F-35 jets. This increase in military spending is also happening in Canada, where the government is planning the purchase of the F-35 jets, and a large number of naval war vessels.

Regarding nuclear weapons, the news is also sombre. This year, Russia

revoked the ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, and several nuclear-armed countries have approved expensive plans for the modernization of their nuclear arsenal.

Further disheartening news during this year is a report by the World Meteorological Organization indicating that the rate of climate change has surged alarmingly between 2011-2020, which was the warmest decade on record. The report emphasizes the need for much more ambitious climate action to try to limit global temperature rise to no more than 1.5 degrees C above the pre-industrial era. The 1.5-degree target is likely to be surpassed in the next five years.

Despite all the bad news, there have been important positive developments during 2023. Concerning the Ukrainian war, there are increasing calls around the world for a negotiated peace deal. In the case of the war in Gaza, the UN Secretary General has recently invoked Article 99 of the UN Charter to call for a ceasefire "to avert a humanitarian catastrophe" in the Palestinian civilian population (see the complete statement below). Furthermore, the UN General Assembly has recently approved by an overwhelming majority a resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire. Notably, Canada voted in favor of this resolution breaking a pattern of unconditional support for Israel.

There is also some important positive news around the issue of nuclear weapons. The State Parties of the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) recently met with the participation of 92 countries. Parliamentarians from several countries that are yet to sign the treaty met on the margins of the conference, issuing a statement urging their governments to sign and ratify the treaty. Notably, four parliamentarians from Canada were included among the signatories. We attach to this newsletter a statement by the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) summarizing the conclusions of the TPNW meeting.

Finally, the just-finished COP 28 meeting attended by 200 countries produced a document that for the first time recognizes the importance of "transitioning away from fossil fuels in energy systems in a just, orderly and equitable manner, accelerating action in this critical decade". Although the statement falls short of calling for the full phase-out of fossil fuels, it is a significant improvement over the final statement issued by COP 27.

In sum, although 2023 has been a very difficult year for peace and climate activists, we have reasons to be optimistic regarding the capacity of human action to confront the challenge that militarism, nuclear war and climate change pose for the survival of humanity. We at Science for Peace are determined to contribute to this fight for our survival.

Happy holidays and the best wishes for 2024.

Jorge Filmus
President
Science for Peace

Upcoming Events

Palestine through the lens of international law Peace and Conflict Lecture

Date: Jan, 17th 5-6:30pm

In-person at the Paul Cadario
Conference Centre, University
College, at U of T; and on Zoom
Zoom link

<https://shorturl.at/puFN8>

In person link:

<https://shorturl.at/ELQXZ>

With Michael Lynk



@scienceforpeace.org

Michael Lynk is Professor Emeritus of Law, Western University, London, Ontario, where he taught international and Canadian human rights law, labour law and constitutional law. Between 2016 and 2022, he served as the United Nations Special Rapporteur for the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967, delivering regular reports to the UN General Assembly and the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

Register below:
[In Person](#)

Secretary-General letter to the Security Council invoking article 99 of the UN Charter

His Excellency Mr. Jose Javier de la Gasca Lopez Dominguez
President of the Security Council
New York

6 December 2023

Dear Mr. President,

I am writing under Article 99 of the United Nations Charter to bring to the attention of the Security Council a matter which, in my opinion, may aggravate existing threats to the maintenance of international peace and security.

More than eight weeks of hostilities in Gaza and Israel have created appalling human suffering, physical destruction and collective trauma across Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

More than 1,200 people were brutally killed, including 33 children, and thousands were injured in the abhorrent acts of terror by Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups on 7 October 2023, which I have repeatedly condemned.

Some 250 people were abducted, including 34 children, more than 130 of whom are still captive. They must be immediately and unconditionally released. Accounts of sexual violence during the attacks are appalling.

Civilians throughout Gaza face grave danger. Since the start of Israel's military operation, more than 15,000 people have reportedly been killed, over 40 per cent of whom were children. Thousands of others have been injured. More than half of all homes have been destroyed. Some 80 per cent of the population of 2.2 million has been forcibly displaced, into increasingly smaller areas. More than 1.1 million people have sought refuge in UNRWA facilities across Gaza, creating overcrowded, undignified, and unhygienic conditions. Others have nowhere to shelter and find themselves on the street. Explosive remnants of war are rendering areas uninhabitable. There is no effective protection of civilians.

The health care system in Gaza is collapsing. Hospitals have turned into battlegrounds. Only 14 hospitals out of 36 facilities are even partially functional. The two major hospitals in south Gaza are operating at three times their bed capacity and are running out of basic supplies and fuel. They are also sheltering thousands of displaced persons. Under these circumstances, more people will die untreated in the coming days and weeks.

Nowhere is safe in Gaza.

Amid constant bombardment by the Israel Defense Forces, and without shelter or the essentials to survive, I expect public order to completely break down soon due to the desperate conditions, rendering even limited humanitarian assistance impossible. An even worse situation could unfold, including epidemic diseases and increased pressure for mass displacement into neighbouring countries.

[In Resolution 2712 \(2023\)](#), the Security Council "calls for the scaling up of the provision of such supplies to meet the humanitarian needs of the civilian population, especially children."

The current conditions are making it impossible for meaningful humanitarian operations to be conducted. We are, nevertheless, preparing options for monitoring the implementation of the resolution, even if we recognize that in the present circumstances, that is untenable.

While delivery of supplies through Rafah continues, quantities are insufficient and have dropped since the pause came to an end. We are simply unable to reach those in need inside Gaza. The capacity of the United Nations and its humanitarian partners has been decimated by supply shortages, lack of fuel, interrupted communications, and growing insecurity. Humanitarian personnel have joined the vast majority of Gazan civilians in evacuating to south Gaza ahead of advancing military operations. At least 130 UNRWA colleagues have been killed, many with their families.

We are facing a severe risk of collapse of the humanitarian system. The situation is fast deteriorating into a catastrophe with potentially irreversible implications for Palestinians as a whole and for peace and security in the

region. Such an outcome must be avoided at all cost.

The international community has a responsibility to use all its influence to prevent further escalation and end this crisis. I urge the members of the Security Council to press to avert a humanitarian catastrophe. I reiterate my appeal for a humanitarian ceasefire to be declared. This is urgent. The civilian population must be spared from greater harm. With a humanitarian ceasefire, the means of survival can be restored, and humanitarian assistance can be delivered in a safe and timely manner across the Gaza Strip.

Please accept, Mr. President, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Antonio Guterres

International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons: ICAN

The Second Meeting of States Parties to the TPNW has successfully concluded and agreed that nuclear deterrence is a significant security problem, requiring urgent attention by the international community, that more research on the impacts of nuclear weapons is needed, and that the harms caused by nuclear weapons use and testing require ongoing attention.

92 countries participated in the meeting as states parties or observers including some that currently endorse the use of nuclear weapons in their defence doctrines. These countries engaged in a robust and interactive debate during the week, adopting a political [declaration](#) and package of [decisions](#).

Nuclear deterrence is a cause of global instability and insecurity

One of the adopted decisions included, for the first time ever, an agreement to work together to challenge the false narratives of nuclear deterrence. States parties mandated states, the International Committee of the Red Cross and ICAN and other stakeholders and experts, *“To challenge the security paradigm based on nuclear deterrence by highlighting and promoting new scientific evidence about the humanitarian consequences and risks of nuclear weapons and juxtaposing this with the risks and assumptions that are inherent in nuclear deterrence.”*

There remains an information gap between what would actually happen as a result of nuclear war and the policies of the nuclear-armed states and their allies, and efforts to bridge this gap are the primary responsibility of those whose policies include the use of nuclear weapons.

New evidence on the impacts of nuclear weapons demand action from the global community

New research was presented during the meeting as well, including that there is much greater understanding of the [cascading effects](#) on food supplies, the financial system and energy supplies that help us better predict the likely effects of nuclear detonations.

It was understood that research alone cannot reduce the risks of nuclear weapons, but that it can inform the public and policy makers about the harm existing in their arsenals or security doctrines.

Additionally, the Scientific Advisory Group presented research [findings](#) showing that the elimination of nuclear weapon facilities is possible and that there are ways to achieve conversion of facilities to civilian use; and there are ways to develop processes for arms control, such as weapon counting and warhead authentication.

Importantly, the Scientific Advisory Group also called for a new UN study on the consequences of nuclear war given the last comprehensive studies were done in the late 1980s.

Centring affected communities

The states heard testimony from members of communities affected by the use, testing and development of nuclear weapons, and heard their calls for recognition by governments of the harms they did to people, particularly Indigenous peoples.

They also heard about the efforts made so far to repair the damage that has scarred people and the land, as well as to open official records and do more research on the health impacts and environmental impacts of nuclear weapons.

These representatives, supported by wider civil society, called for the clean

up and remediation of lands - through Articles 6 and 7 of the TPNW - in which Indigenous peoples must be involved as the Traditional Owners, and research on nuclear weapon impacts on intangible cultural heritage.

A joint [statement](#) endorsed by 26 nuclear affected community-led organisations, and supported by a further 45 allied organisations said “*We have the right and responsibility to speak about what nuclear weapons really do... We call on States Parties to the TPNW to push relentlessly for its universalisation.*”

Other stakeholders

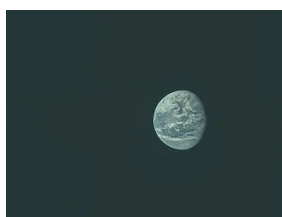
A delegation of 23 parliamentarians from 14 countries mostly from countries that are yet to sign the treaty [met](#) on the margins of the conference, and delivered a statement denouncing nuclear threats while urging governments to sign and ratify the treaty urgently.

The financial community was also present, delivering a [joint statement](#) by more than 90 investors, representing over \$1 trillion in assets under management, encouraging states to work with the financial community to further strengthen the norms and objectives of the treaty, including by ending financing relationships with the nuclear arms industry.

During the week, more than 65 events, including art exhibitions, concerts, panel discussions, awards ceremonies and more were held on the margins of the meeting.

The Third Meeting of States Parties to the treaty will take place 3-7 March, 2025 in New York.

Recent Events and Publications



Richard Sandbrook: The “Earth for All” Report: Good Policies, Inadequate Politics

It is a harsh truth: no matter how sound the analysis of a problem and no matter how reasonable and progressive the proposed policy solutions, without a workable political strategy, the vision is more in the way of wishful thinking than a practical guide.

[Continue reading..](#)

Science for Peace
Peace and Conflict Lectures,
Fall 2023

Dr. Jill Carr-Harris:
“Nonviolent Social Action:
Sharing Experiences in
War, Conflict and with
Climate Change”
Tuesday December 5th,
5-6:30pm
scienceforpeace.org

Location: On Zoom
Registration
Link:
<https://tinyurl.com/4f9jnb7z>

Jill, an International Peace Specialist at the International Gandhi Institute for Peace and Nonviolence, has lived and worked with marginalized communities in India, as well as promoting international peace initiatives. She has learned from experience how nonviolent action inspires strategies and shifts in perspectives for meeting some of the most critical problems of our time.

Nonviolent Social Action: Sharing Experiences in War, Conflict and with Climate Change

Dr. Jill-Carr Harris, an International Peace Specialist at the International Gandhi Institute for Peace and Nonviolence, has lived and worked with marginalized communities in India, as well as promoting international peace initiatives.

[View recording](#)

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