IPPNW WORLD CONGRESS 2008  STUDENT PSR REPORT

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Former International Student Representative Ruth Mitchell and the ICAN-garoo (ICAN stands for the International Coalition to Abolish Nuclear Weapons)
Medical Alliance to Stop Global Warming: Presentation and Workshop

On March 7th, the Medical Alliance to Stop Global Warming (MASGW) presented alongside students from Pune and Abhinav Singh about climate change and environmental health during the first session of the students’ congress. While the title of this session, Effects of War, may prima facie seem to imply the plenary session will focus only on direct effects violence, one might make the argument that the Iraq war contributes to usage and ongoing reliance on fossil fuels, and hence on climate change.

During this shared plenary, all students highlighted the large responsibility of the developed world on climate change, and the disproportionate effect of climate change on the developing world. Members of the MASGW Steering Committee (Student PSR NSRs Tova Fuller and Lauren Zajac) led an introduction to the issue and then shared their current work on environmental health, speaking about campus events across the country, Focus the Nation efforts, the AMSA pre-conference in Houston, TX, theirCall To Action, and other efforts the US is making to draw attention to this grave threat to human health. Abhinav Singh and students from Pune presented hard evidence that global warming is affected by human activity, and shared the specific effects this would have on human health - both directly and indirectly through such phenomena as greater infectious diseases, etc.

A later workshop led MASGW and the students from Pune first reviewed material presented during the plenary, and then moved on to a brainstorming session, in which Tova Fuller led small groups of students in a “time travel” activity; students “traveled” to an ideal world in which global warming was no longer a problem. Participants imagined a future’s past that guided them to this entirely green world in an attempt to think both positively and creatively about steps that need to be taken - from legislation to personal actions. Finally, Lauren Zajac collected commitments from students either in their personal lives and/or in student organizing. The MASGW will calculate the impact of these actions and plan to email the IPPNW listserv upon returning home with the net impact of the members of this workshop in order to inspire others.

Small Arms Violence and the International Coalition to Abolish Small Arms

Previous to the IPPNW Students’ Congress, several students including Nigerian student and new International Student Representative Ehase Agyeno, American students Jack Wang and Tova Fuller, and Latin American students Nidia Rodriguez (of Ecuador) and Cesar Aleman (of Nicaragua) decided to form a group that would provide cohesion to student work on small arms. This group, entitled the International Student Coalition to Abolish Small Arms (ISCASA) would work parallel to existent IPPNW program, Aiming for Prevention, to draw parallels between small arms violence on different continents and provide support to involved students. During the IPPNW Students’ Congress, students from several continents presented on small arms and light weapons - presenters included Abhinav Singh and Andrew Winnington, both of whom presented during plenary Session II: Modes of Destruction. Furthermore, a later workshop highlighted the work of Kenyan student Walter Odhiambo, Nigerian student Mansur Ramalan, Latin American students and American students. At the end of this workshop, Tova Fuller moderated a discussion of where ISCASA is going, and handed out a report detailing her current knowledge of small arms work. An idea that was presented was the creation of a virtual map of the world on the IPPNW students’ website, with hyperlinks on countries where student work on small arms is being done, along with key facts and details about this work and links to One Bullet Stories. During the following discussion, students were encouraged to share ideas for resources they think would be helpful in their own work including, but not limited to:

- A list of funding resources
- Victim testimonies (perhaps informally, and not via One Bullet Stories)
- A photo gallery
- Short versions of clinical data that one can present easily
- Research on trade and production specific to high conflict areas

Students present at the congress agreed on having conference calls via Skype every 2-3 months, and will be communicating via the ISCASA google group.

Tova Fuller (NSR) with Cesar Aleman (Nicaragua) during the students’ Small Arms Workshop

Lauren Zajac (NSR) presenting on climate change
Student Reflections
Chris Brubaker: University of Cincinnati, PSR Board Member

I came to India after attending the IPPNW world congresses in Beijing and Helsinki and actively participating in a number of IPPNW and PSR programs at home and abroad. Even after these experiences, the congress in Delhi was a completely unique and tremendously valuable experience.

While I learned a great deal from the content of the congress, in particular the presentations and plenaries from students and speakers from South Asia and the Middle east, the greatest value of this conference for me came from a deeper understanding of what it meant to be a citizen of these parts of the world, and how the threat and reality of conflict and nuclear war colored the day-to-day lives of these people.

Though it sounds cliché, I was again amazed at how similar we all are, around the world. Going to India hammered home the challenges we still face in public health in much of the world, and how dramatically sanitation and access to shelter can change a person's life. It's been easy to forget that I've forgotten how much of the rest of the world lives, and this congress reminded me that we share the burden of improving everyday life just as much as the equally difficult tasks of nuclear disarmament and global warming.

Since Helsinki, there's been an explosion in social networking websites and technology, leading many people, including me, to question the utility of a face-to-face congress. I can say without any hesitation that people sitting together in the same room and talking is absolutely essential. This congress revitalized me and my commitment to activism, renewed old friendships, and introduced me to new people in a way that no amount of time online could do.

I have a lot of special, happy memories from this congress. Arriving early and spending a day with Ruth and Lauren from Australia and Abhinav from India before welcoming the Peace March to Delhi amidst a swarm of angry, stopped traffic; seeing presentations on conflict and life as a medical student in Kashmir and Iran; watching in amazement as every south Asian male attendee rushed the stage to dance without the least hint of inhibition; having American and Scandinavian cultural nights in the alcohol-free, no-guests-allowed YMCA rooms (this is truly how friends are made); wandering around Connaught circle and the grounds of the Taj Mahal with close friends, some of whom I'd met just days before; and the incredible, tangible sense of connection and enthusiasm to keep working towards a world free of conflict and nuclear weapons.

These are the things that most impressed me from Delhi, and will stay with me as I continue to work with these new friends.

Student Reflections
Tova Fuller: University of California Los Angeles, PSR National Student Representative

My expectations of this congress largely stemmed from my experience in Helsinki, at the previous IPPNW World congress. I had a sense that India would be different, but was unsure of what exactly to expect; I also felt a little nervous presenting on climate change and environmental health in a developing country coming from the United States, a major source of the problem. As webmaster for the IPPNW student website, I had been typing several attendees' names for months, and was anxious to meet face to face. Furthermore, I was excited to talk to others about small arms violence and what we could do to strengthen the International Student Coalition Against Small Arms (ISCASA).

Upon arrival we were welcomed with open arms by the Indian students as well as other international participants. Our presentation on climate change was shared with members of developing countries, and for my part, I felt we were united across the globe against a single threat. During the small arms workshop, there was quite a bit of interest in sharing resources and developing a stronger alliance through Skype conference calls – this alliance had long been but a dream of mine and a few others (Agyeno Ehase from Nigeria, Jack Wang from Stanford University, Cesar Aleman from Nicaragua, and Nidia Rodriguez from Ecuador) and it finally felt like we were picking up steam. It was the ties of friendship and solidarity that had sustained us from the last conference to this one, and this face-to-face meeting provided me with the energy to continue onwards with helping organize ISCASA.

Amongst my favorite moments of the conference was seeing the multitude of candles lit for the Peace March at the onset of the physicians' conference; what a way to symbolize peace than small points of warm light held by members from around the globe – old friends, new friends, and colleagues alike.

Next Steps for SPSR (see end)
Next Steps as IPPNW-Students' Webmaster:
• Switch the IPPNW Student site (www.ippnw-students.org) over to a content management system to enhance the organization’s web capabilities.
Student Reflections
Paul Phelps: Drexel University

I was excited from the moment of our arrival in India when we took a worn-out cab to the location of our conference at the YMCA hostel. Medical students and activists at this conference shared much of the same passion that I have for making a peaceful world free of nuclear weapons for future generations. It was bound to be an interesting and productive conference.

The first day of the student conference I found that there were nearly one hundred international medical students who had gone on a peace march from the border of Pakistan to the heart of India educating and raising awareness of the nuclear issue. They spread a banner with flags from the countries represented to demonstrate solidarity against nuclear arms. It was a solid start to what would be an amazing conference.

We met students from all over the world who are also dedicated to the abolition of weapons. It was encouraging to see what people were doing in their respective countries, from Iran to Japan; medical students are passionate about ending the existence of nuclear weapons. To hear the Japanese students talk about the effect of a nuclear bomb made the horrific effects of these weapons palpable.

Within two days of the student conference I was encouraged by what I learned. For example, New Zealand is a nuclear free zone and has been since 1987. I was impressed that a developed nation could remain nuclear weapon free despite changes in governmental administration; it seems the people of New Zealand are decidedly anti-nuclear. In fact, New Zealand has a Minister for Disarmament and Arms Control whose job is to facilitate ridding the world of nuclear weapons. It certainly gives one hope that the same may one day be accomplished in the United States.

It was also exciting to hear students talk about the aims of the ICAN program. Their enthusiasm has encouraged me to engage in further activism at my home institution. Despite the demanding hours of third year, I believe that I will convey the messages I learned at the student conference.

I was also impressed by the Physician conference. It was interesting to learn about modern militarism of the United States, plans to reduce our nuclear arsenal, and the resistance that more experienced PSR members have met over the years. I hope that the leadership shown by them can be passed on to our generation of PSR to accomplish the goal of ridding the world of nuclear weapons.

Next Steps at Drexel University:
1. Set up a Drexel PSR meeting to discuss my experience at the IPPNW conference.
2. I plan to distribute ICAN pamphlets to classmates.
4. Consider a future Target X project in Philadelphia.

Student Reflections
Alicia Pointer: University of New England College of Osteopathic Medicine

On my desk, I have a picture of the Taj Mahal. Actually being there, however, is very different [louder, brighter, more colorful] than the 4x6 photo. Likewise, it is difficult to put to paper a brief description of what I gained from the IPPNW World Congress.

I went to the congress without knowing a great deal about nuclear weapons. At the plenaries and panel discussions, I learned about the approximate number and location of the world’s nuclear weapons, the money being spent on nuclear development as compared to human development and many of the challenges we face in eliminating nuclear weapons. I learned about the Model Nuclear Weapons Convention, ICAN and the Nuclear Weapons Inheritance Project, all efforts at abolishing nuclear weapons. While seeing photos and hearing stories about the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki (images and stories that many of us know), I was, once again, shocked that such conferences are still necessary today.

In Delhi, I also gained new arguments against nuclear power such as the CO2 emissions produced by uranium mining and studies showing the detrimental health effects for those who live near nuclear power plants or uranium mines. One of the things that affected me most was hearing from a man who lived near the Jadugoda uranium mines. Referring to the increased risk of congenital abnormalities and childhood cancer, he told us that “there, when a baby is about to be born, people cry.” (Meanwhile, outside the YMCA, I would see the people whose children are begging for food while we spend billions of dollars on nuclear weapons, the same people whose voices are least likely to be heard when someone finds uranium in their backyards.)

There is so much to be done. In this sense, the Congress provided me with a sense of urgency, oftentimes a good quality when it comes to getting things done. But there is also so much being done, which gave me hope, something I consider a necessity when it comes to getting things done. Hundreds of medical students and physicians demonstrated a committed passion for working toward peace and justice. And those were just the ones who could attend the conference. They brought stories of the many others who could not attend but were working toward the same goals. Now, when the urgency overwhelms the hope, I know there are people working with me. And I know where to find them. The last night of the student congress, we had a candlelight peace rally. Candles have become cliché, but it’s true- many of us lit up a space that one of us could not.
I learned much more during my five days in Delhi-including information about small arms violence, the effects of globalization, peace-making and renewable energy-but even that is just the tip of the Taj Mahal. One of the most important things I gained from the Congress was the knowledge that there is much I do not know. I left Delhi with a better idea of what those gaps are, a desire to learn more and the resources to do so.

Next Steps at UNE:

PSR at UNE has tended to focus on environmental issues and non-violence. Obviously, nuclear weapons and power are intimately connected with these two issues and I would like to find ways to make these connections more apparent. Two ways of doing this are promoting discussions within UNE PSR, as many of our members tend to place nuclear weapons on the back burner, and organizing lunchtime lectures for the medical school.

Some other steps I have recommended since returning from the Congress include:

1. Forming alliances with other student groups (e.g. NOWPA, Peds club, Public Health club) by framing nuclear weapons as a public health issue
2. Petitioning our mayor to become a Mayor for Peace
3. Staying up-to-date with policy issues and writing op-eds, communicating with policy makers appropriately
4. Strengthening our advocacy for sources of renewable energy through school-wide campaigns and by joining the school’s environmental council
5. I have also strongly recommended that next year’s officers as well as the class below them attend the PSR national conference and hopefully that will inspire them to attend the IPPNW World Congress in two years.

Next Steps for SPSR (see below)

Next Steps at Mount Sinai:
1. Organize an event about nuclear weapons, security issues, and physician advocacy around these issues.
2. Encourage classmates and faculty to get involved with existing peace efforts.
3. Distribute information about nuclear weapons issues.
4. Continue work with the Greening Coalition to improve sustainability at Mount Sinai.

Next Steps for SPSR

1. Security Resource Packets and Mini-Grant Application: We will be assembling welcome packets for student PSR chapters to be delivered next fall as students are returning from school. These packets will include basic information on nuclear weapons issues, ideas for campus events, and existing networks/campaigns to get involved with. There will also be a flyer advertising a mini grant for security-related work—we will offer up to $100 for each campus event focusing on security issues.
2. International Small Arms Work: Tova will be working on a webpage as mentioned previously that will contain resources for small arms work, with help from others, including Jack Wang at Stanford University, who is currently doing an IRB-approved study on small arms violence in Palo Alto. We will continue to work with International Coalition for the Abolition of Small Arms (ICASA), and recruit more US students to the movement.
3. Expand Medical Alliance Work: We hope to expand our Medical Alliance programming to include international partners. We will contact interested colleagues from IPPNW congress and establish forums to communicate and share resources.

Student Reflections

Lauren Zajac: Mount Sinai School of Medicine, PSR National Student Representative

The IPPNW World Congress was a formative, powerful experience that strengthened my commitment to working for peace. The passion of the hundreds of students and physicians was palpable, and gave me a sense of hope and comfort. This was exemplified at the peace rally, where I spoke with friends from more than a dozen countries and lit candles for each other as part of the human race with a common goal. The plenary sessions to one-on-one discussions, I gained a depth and breadth of knowledge on peace and security issues to better inform my activism. I especially enjoyed the panel on globalization and subsequent follow up discussions with other students about incorporating global health and social justice into our work as an international medical student alliance. The location of the congress—New Delhi, India—provided me a first hand account of global poverty, which is a consequence of unjust allocation of resources. Instead of investing in social, health, and environmental issues, a disproportionate amount of resources is spent on the military-industrial complex...and the poor of the world suffer.

I am looking forward to strengthening the connections I made in Delhi and shaping my career as a physician to be a sustainable voice for change.

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Left: Peace March Inaugural Session

Bottom Right: Tova, Lauren, and Alicia at the Taj Majal