

IPPNW delegation visit to PSR Iran 11-14 no 2012.

Participants: Drs Derman Boztok and Tufan Kaan, Turkey, Matthias Jochheim, Germany, Gunnar Westberg, Sweden. Vladimir Garkavenko - Co-president of IPPNW - Russia, Sara Shah, Norway.

Medical students Erik Wareborn, Sweden, Alix Shou, Denmark. Also participated Josefin Lind, ICAN rep. and information officer for SLMK.

From the Iranian side we met with drs Shahriar Khateri and Leila Moein, as well as Dr M. Reza Sorousch, President of PSR Iran., and staff and volunteers of the Peace Museum. Maral Hassanshahi, National Student Representative, had done much work to establish contacts with the medical school before the visit and gave great assistance for the visitors who continued their travel to Esfahan and Shariz.

Sponsors: Travel: SLMK and other IPPNW affiliates. IPPNW travel fund and the participants themselves. The costs in Tehran were generously covered by the Mayor of Tehran. We are very grateful to the mayor.

Background.

Since its founding about six years ago, PSR Iran, the IPPNW affiliate in Iran, has been moderately active, with the main activity among students. When Gunnar Westberg last visited Tehran in 2011 the medical students expressed a wish for support from students elsewhere in Europe.

Program:

The program included visits to three hospitals and to the Medical University. We were guided through the peace museum by dr Khateri. There were presentations of IPPNW and IPPNW Students activities at the Museum, and two presentations on the long term effect on health of war. The social program was extensive, fun and contributed to building relations.

We also met with the ambassadors of Sweden, Denmark and Norway. These visits lasted for between one and two hours.

The deputy minister of the Disarmament Section of the Foreign Office, Mr Nazir, received us for a meeting of one hour.

A meeting was arranged with a group of 15 medical students, who had just finished a course in toxicology of agents used in chemical warfare. They were very interested in the work of PSR Iran. They had visited field hospitals and studied triage, mass care, disaster medicine and medical consequences of chemical warfare.

**What we learnt about Iran and the nations politics.
“The most misunderstood country on earth”, according to a
foreign diplomat.**

Nuclear weapons program. This was not much discussed. The gov't claims they have no nuclear weapons program, and the security and intelligence services of USA and Israel agree: There is no nuclear weapons program and there has not been any since 2003. To discuss under what circumstances the county might change its attitude to nuclear weapons was not considered meaningful.

Nuclear power program: This subject is almost taboo. It would be interesting to speculate about the reasons for this attitude, but we learnt nothing new during our visit.

Sanctions: There are three kinds of sanction; UN, US, and EU sanctions. The discontinuation of the bank transfers is hurting badly, esp. for the middle class. The poorest people still get subsidies from the gov't but inflation has decreased the value.

Several of the persons we met emphasized that the economic problems of the country were not caused solely by the sanctions. The mismanagement of the economy and the corruption also contributed, maybe more than the sanctions.

Medicines are now hard to find, both basic medicines and special drugs for treatment of, for instance, cancer. There are no sanctions on medicines, we were told by the ambassadors. It is possible that some pharmaceutical companies have been wary that there would be no way to transfer money. Money can probably still be transferred through a bank in Germany and one in Turkey. There is a

large currency reserve in Iran, maybe close to 100 Bn €. Maybe the main responsibility rests with the Ministry of Health?

We decided here to wait and see if the shortage on medicines can be solved. We should keep an active interest in this problem!

One ambassador expressed clearly that he did not believe that the sanctions will change the nuclear program. Others were uncertain. The ambassador of Denmark seemed to support the sanctions also for other reasons than the nuclear program.

CTBT. Iran ought to ratify this treaty to decrease suspicion. The representative of the Minister for Foreign Affairs gave a long but evasive response.

The meeting with this minister was positive in the sense that he wanted us to come back. He said that there is no reason to exclude citizens of USA or UK from our delegations!

Evaluation of the visit

The meeting was a good experience for the visitors. Our hosts were very helpful. The visits to the embassies, not part of the original program, were instructive. The difference in opinion between the three embassies was surprising! The hospital visits, the meetings with the victims of chemical warfare and in particular the Peace Museum itself were emotionally strong.

Value for PSR Iran: The organisation was recognized by the MFA and three embassies, by Mayors of Tehran as well as in hospitals and in the medical school. Maybe the active members received a boost in their commitment to the cause of PSR Iran.

There was some media coverage of our visit. Here a link to the English language Iranian TV: <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/11/12/271839/nuclear-war/>

The contacts with other European affiliates of IPPNW was valuable for both sides.

IPPNW students were invited to take part in a coming field trip in February 2013 to study medical consequences of war and WMD.

We had hoped for more meetings with medical students. Our hosts had tried to convince the Dean of the medical school of the value of such a meeting. Instead we were shown around in research laboratories. Many attempts had also been made, by phone and mail, to contact institutions in the medical school, but few answers had been forthcoming.

After our meetings Dr Khateri and Dr Moein made a follow up of the visit to the University and were getting feedback from the students. It seems that our visits paved the way for recruiting more medical students to coming events and there was more interest among medical school authorities for hosting disarmament activities.

Drs Kahteri and Moein and others will organize a series of events in the universities in the near future.

Thus we have reason to hope that the visit may have helped to strengthen the PSR Iran, especially its medical student group

The personal meetings between the Iranian and European doctors and students are of course of great importance.

The “tourist” visits are of great importance for the emotional commitment of the visitors. This wonderful country, this great people! War is never an option!

Gunnar Westberg