



International Day of Peace 21 September

Doctors for Peace

#InTheNameOfPeace; #NotATarget; #DoctorsForPeace;

War and armed conflict constitute a serious threat to health, yet they are often neglected in our medical education.

Researchers have long before predicted that by 2020 war will be one of the top 10 causes of disability and death. The events unfolding over the last decade globally have shown that this date has been brought forward.

Health professionals are the ones, who are not only dealing with the reality of these predictions, rather they have also become victims of war, considering their role to being near those in need.

On this International Day of Peace, should we as medical professionals take a stance on war? Shall we stand up for the human right to peace?

If we get a glimpse on the history, we will see that at the first International conference on Health Promotion, the presented Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion recognizes peace as the first prerequisite for health. Furthermore, bodies such as the World Medical Association (WMA) subscribe to the goals of disarmament, conflict prevention and peace building.

In 1981 the World Health Assembly said: ‘the role of physicians and other health workers in the preservation and promotion of peace is the most significant factor for the attainment of health for all.’

Spiegel and Salama, the authors of the Kosovo epidemiological study argue, “Understanding mortality that results from modern warfare, in which 90% of casualties are civilian, and identifying vulnerable civilian groups are of critical public health importance” And, “War is one critical determinant of the health status of populations in many parts of the world.” Many other studies and articles convey similar sentiments.

The effect of war goes beyond bombs and bullets. Famine and disease often follow and healthcare systems are disrupted. There are also the psychological scars of war that last longer than any physical ill. So, analyzing the effects of war on the health of the civilian population is within the remit of doctors. Moreover, war costs lives, and if we can save some by standing up for peace, then we ought to.

Doctors are best positioned to engage for peace and preventing war, or alleviating its effects, since health care is provided for altruistic reasons. As such it goes beyond any political, religious, or ethnic differences. Furthermore, health care is based on science, which means it can be more objective about the consequences and effects of war and not biased by the views of one group or another.

Therefore, health professionals should not confine their role only within the walls of the hospital; rather they should engage in domains from where they would reduce the conditions that promote war.

As mentioned above, healthcare workers and facilities in armed conflict zones are increasingly being attacked. According to WHO, in 2018, in total of 13 countries there have been 149 attacks on healthcare facilities, leading to 221 deaths and 261 injuries.

In the spirit of the International Day of Peace and the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we, the doctors and medical students, members of the IPPNW (International Physicians for Prevention of Nuclear War) affiliates of the Western Balkans Region, would like to raise our voice for the for the following issues:

- Firstly, as members of the IPPNW originating from the Western Balkans, having witnessed the atrocities of the wars at the territory of ex – Yugoslavia, we call upon the governments for active engagement in peace promotion and non-violent conflict resolution, as well as their recognition that everybody has a role to play in the peace building process.
- Western Balkans affiliates, united under the umbrella of IPPNW, strictly condemn any harm and infliction of pain towards healthcare workers and other civilians in armed conflict areas.
- We call upon International Organizations to strengthen the protection policies for healthcare workers in the field, by providing them with necessary equipments and finances to deliver the care towards civilians.
- We, IPPNW Western Balkans, call upon action to all stakeholders to develop facilitative strategies of delivering the essential medicines to armed conflict zones

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