**Statement**

***Neighbours as friends, not enemies***

**Nordic-Russian seminar, PRIO, Oslo, 3.- 4. February 2020**

A Nordic-Russian civil society seminar was organized in Oslo 3. - 4. February 2020 by the International League for Peace and Freedom, Norway, and the Norwegian Peace Association.

The theme of the seminar was “Neighbours as friends, not enemies”. The seminar, which gathered some 45 participants from Denmark, Finland, Norway, Russia and Sweden was a follow up to a Nordic peace and dialogue trip to Russia May 2018. The seminar was held at the Norwegian Peace Institute Oslo, PRIO, and was funded by the Norwegian Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

The main intention with the seminar was to strengthen relations between peace workers in the North, discuss common challenges and visions and contribute to mutual understanding and perhaps even help reduce the present tension. The tension between the West and Russia is one of the drivers behind the present militarization and arms’ race, involving both traditional and nuclear weapons.

Participants had open discussions on how to promote peace, disarmament and a sound environment, and agreed to seek ways to continue with practical and strategic forward-looking initiatives and solution-oriented dialogues. Many echoed the words of the Mayor of the border city of Kirkenes, that soldiers and fences along the borders are not so important, but that our security lies in the people to people cooperation.

The use of enemy images and the demonization of leaders both in mainstream political discourse and media was considered outdated cold war rhetoric, which is dangerous as it installs fear and also contributes to a generalized acceptance of rising military budgets.

Participants agreed that we should not accept that the world’s resources, natural, financial and intellectual, are being misused for military purposes, and that we need to prove that this thinking is dangerous, naive and obsolete.

The military actually makes us less safe, both economically and ecologically, by taking so much of the resources that are needed for other purposes and by the enormous greenhouse gas emissions, the radiation and pollution it provides.

We cannot allow the military to be an exception to international climate agreements. Instead we must move the money to be able to tackle the real security issues such as the threat to the very survival of humanity and the planet, be it by climate change, environmental degradation, excessive inequality or nuclear weapons.

Different alternatives were discussed of how to find “the cracks in the walls”, literally and figuratively, “to get the light in”, to paraphrase Leonard Cohen.

How can we contribute to changing attitudes in order to reverse the nuclear and space-arms race, reduce defence spending and get us out of the dominant growth oriented, militarized, confrontational and competitive patterns? In short, how can we build common security, human security, a culture of peace, and non-violence?

Among the concrete suggestions were:

To continue the sharing of knowledge and ideas, to get inspiration from each other’s culture and art, to work for the strengthening of civil society and democratic practices, to establish permanent structures for peace, such as ministries and departments for peace to promote peace at all levels, to cherish and use the UN and multilateral cooperation, to help implement the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement on climate, to strive for a non militarized and nuclear free Arctic and Baltic Sea basin, to maintain the Arctic Council non-militarized and operational, to gather individual signatures and cities for the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, to continue to warn against nuclear and other hazardous waste and make waste management safer, to seek closer cooperation between the peace movement and environmental organizations across gender and generational divides, and to seek ways of producing and consuming which ensures the well being of all and the integrity of the biosphere.

Finally, it was considered vital to contribute to the creation of a generalized “ active disgust for war” to use the words of Bertha von Suttner and to build trust between peoples, so essential for real cooperation, and for our survival.

The two organisations behind the seminar, the International League for Peace and Freedom, Norway, and the Norwegian Peace Association, are planning a follow up seminar in 2021.