



International Physicians
for the Prevention of Nuclear War



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US and Russian Doctors Warn of Possible Global Catastrophe from Escalating Conflict in Ukraine

Malden, MA—American and Russian physicians representing International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) recipient of the 1985 Nobel Peace Prize, are warning that a war in Ukraine could lead to a humanitarian catastrophe as a result of conventional fighting and the attendant risks to that country's nuclear power facilities and of escalation to nuclear war.

A war could also lead to another nuclear disaster, similar or worse than the 1986 Chernobyl reactor meltdown, affecting people not only in Ukraine but in all of Europe, according to Linda Pentz Gunter, founder of [Beyond Nuclear](#). “No matter the genesis, the cause, or who started what, the reality remains that there are 15 operating nuclear reactors in Ukraine that, if conflict breaks out there, could be in peril. If the reactors find themselves amidst a conflict or war, they cannot simply be abandoned by the workforce. This makes the prospects of a war in Ukraine all the more alarming, and the imperative to avoid this all the more urgent.”

Dr. Ira Helfand, a leading expert on the medical effects of nuclear war and author of [Nuclear Famine: Two Billion People at Risk – Global Impacts of Limited Nuclear War on Agriculture, Food Supplies, and Human Nutrition](#), urged the parties to the dispute, armed with nuclear weapons, to consider the consequences if the conflict escalates to the use of nuclear weapons. NATO and Russian military doctrines allow for the use of tactical nuclear weapons to fend off defeat in a major conventional war. “If even a single 100-kiloton nuclear weapon exploded over the Kremlin, it could kill a quarter of a million people and injure a million more, completely overwhelming the disaster response capability of the Russian capital. A single 100 kiloton bomb detonated over the US Capital would kill over 170,000 people and injure nearly 400,000,” said Dr. Helfand. “But it is unlikely that an escalating nuclear conflict between the US and Russia would involve single warheads over their respective capitals. Rather it is more likely that there would be many weapons directed against many cities and many of these weapons would be substantially larger than 100 Kt.”

Even if an accidental or deliberate nuclear disaster is avoided, a conventional war would have devastating impacts on human health and well-being. “Much death and illness could occur among noncombatant civilians from explosive weapons, population displacement, and damage to hospitals and clinics, water treatment plants, and the food supply system, said Dr. Barry Levy, a leading expert on the health consequences of armed conflict and author of the forthcoming book [From Horror to Hope: Recognizing and Preventing the Health Impacts of War](#). “As a result, children and pregnant women would suffer from malnutrition, more infants would be born prematurely, and more women would die during childbirth. More people would contract communicable diseases, including COVID-19. More older people, who comprise more than one-sixth of Ukraine's population, would develop complications of heart disease, lung disorders, and diabetes. And many Ukrainians would suffer from depression and posttraumatic stress disorder,” added Dr. Levy.

Dr. Olga Mironova, a cardiologist in Moscow and president of IPPNW's Russian affiliate, led an [emergency discussion](#) of these dangers, urging prevention and dialogue to avoid a humanitarian disaster. She underscored IPPNW's support of an [appeal](#) by our European colleagues that calls on all parties to the conflict to step back from the brink and to persevere with diplomatic efforts aimed at reducing tensions and negotiating a peaceful settlement.

Contact Michael Christ @ IPPNW to arrange further comment or interviews.