

Statement on the North Korean Nuclear Weapon Test
from International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War

October 9, 2006

The test explosion of a nuclear weapon, announced today by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, was an irresponsible and dangerous action that can only be seen as a giant step backward for the people of North Korea and for the entire North Asian region. The government of Kim Jong Il has undermined the stability of the region and has jeopardized the security and well being of its own people, who may now suffer the repercussions of an outraged and anxious international community.

At the same time, the other nuclear weapon states have failed to make good on their decades-old commitment to eliminate their own nuclear arsenals. Had they already done so, we are confident that the DPRK would have seen no value in nuclear weapons and that the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran would not be causing global anxiety. The nuclear weapon states have committed themselves, as members of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), to abolish all their nuclear weapons. They have, however, broken their pledge, saying that they need nuclear weapons for their security. During the Korean war, the US considered the use of nuclear weapons and has repeatedly threatened to use them against the DPRK since then. Countries such as the DPRK and Iran, often threatened by the US, might understandably resent this double standard and desire the same capacity for nuclear deterrence claimed by the US. The protection brought by nuclear weapons, however, is illusory, regardless of who owns them. Should the DPRK develop and test long range missiles, along with nuclear warheads that could be transported on these missiles, it would merely exacerbate the risk of attack by the US and its allies. Nuclear weapons bring war, not security.

IPPNW physicians and medical students have visited Pyongyang several times -- most recently in August 2005 -- in an effort to establish better relations with Korean doctors, to support medical education and improved health care, and to open lines of communication around issues of peace and security in the region. This inexcusable nuclear test has squandered resources that are desperately needed by the Korean people for food, housing, and health care. Moreover, it has needlessly provoked the country's neighbors and the rest of the world, with the likely result that the DPRK will become even further isolated in the months ahead. Where IPPNW and its affiliates had been championing a North Asia Nuclear Weapons Free Zone, we now face the prospect of a regional nuclear arms race.

The highest priority of the international community must now be to help the countries of the region withdraw from the nuclear precipice. We strongly urge restraint by all parties. Under no circumstance should a preventive or pre-emptive attack be contemplated. Peace and lasting security in North Asia depend upon everyone with a stake in the region using every diplomatic means at their disposal to defuse this crisis and reach an agreement.

The DPRK's nuclear test must be seen as a wake-up call to the other nuclear weapon states, who must no longer avoid negotiating a Nuclear Weapons Convention to rid the world of these genocidal weapons. The International Court of Justice has unanimously declared that they have an obligation to do so under international law.

A nuclear war, whether limited to the Korean Peninsula, or extending further into North Asia or beyond, would be a catastrophe of almost unimaginable proportions, exterminating vast populations and destroying the lives of future generations. Those who are responsible for such a war will not be forgiven; neither will those who could have prevented the catastrophe, but did not even make the attempt.