



International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War *Canada*

We are committed to the abolition of nuclear weapons, the prevention of war, the promotion of non-violent means of conflict resolution and social justice in a sustainable world.

President's Letter

Dr. Jonathan Down

June 13th, 2020

When the video of the brutal murder of a black man named George Floyd by a white police officer surfaced in the midst of a global pandemic of COVID-19, the underlying racism in the United States reached a level that could no longer be tolerated. Millions of people risked their lives to pour into the streets demanding to be heard. This is not simply a cry for justice at this one killing. It is the outpouring of anger at centuries of colonialism, slavery, and injustice. Although race-based data for COVID-19 is not collected in Canada, in the United States blacks, people of colour and ethnic minorities are at increased risk for contracting the disease. In the face of this risk and the risk of police brutality they refuse to stop protesting until there are deep and permanent changes.

Canada is not immune to racism. Our history of violence and oppression of the indigenous and racialized in our country is a national disgrace. A year after the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was released, none of the recommendations have been enacted. The missing and murdered indigenous women did not make a dent in the system. The inadequate healthcare provided for indigenous populations cannot be tolerated any longer.

Physicians have long called violence a public health issue, whether the violence is domestic or international. Racism is also a public health issue. We call upon governments to address the structural racism in our education systems, our health care, employment, and justice systems. We must take a hard look at ourselves and our own attitudes, and hold ourselves to a higher level of practice. We call upon our colleagues to join actions to reform our society, dismantle systemic racism and end white supremacy.

The rank injustice of allowing the wealth of our nations to funnel up to a handful of people while the rest become poorer year after year is not acceptable; nor is the distribution of wealth to build vast military industries at the expense of human needs. The Covid virus has forced cities to take action to house the homeless despite years of saying there was no money and no solution to give shelter to the destitute.

This is the time for all of us to pull together. We do not want to get back to normal. Normal was the problem. We want to go forward to a world where people of all races and ethnicities are equal and all are treated with fairness and justice.

In peace,

Jonathan Down, FRCP(C).