

# Nuclear Weapons: Impact on Humanity

## **Nuclear weapons are the worst instruments of mass murder ever created**

- A single nuclear weapon can destroy a city, causing hundreds of thousands of excruciating deaths by blast, burns, and radiation.
- A nuclear war between the United States and Russia could destroy virtually all life on earth.
- Detonation of fewer than 1% of existing nuclear weapons can disrupt agricultural production so severely that billions of lives will be lost.
- Weapons this powerful and destructive belong in no one's hands. The only way to prevent their use—and their Earth-shattering consequences—is to eliminate them.

## **What would happen if nuclear weapons were used?**

### **Physical trauma and burns**

- Nuclear weapons have extreme blast and burn effects that kill people and destroy infrastructure on a scale and with an intensity that puts them in a class of their own.
- The heat wave from a nuclear detonation incinerates everything combustible in its path, including human flesh. Firestorms consume all remaining oxygen, suffocating everyone who managed to take refuge from the flames themselves.
- The blast wave and associated overpressures and hurricane-force winds collapse all but the strongest buildings, destroy roads and transportation systems, and turn objects (including human victims) into missiles that amplify the damage, until nothing remains but rubble.
- An electromagnetic pulse disrupts the electricity supply grid and electronic equipment and systems, including computers, medical equipment and satellite communications.
- These levels of destruction, which are more extreme than produced by any other weapon, cannot be limited to military targets or to combatants.

### **Radiation**

- Nuclear weapons produce ionizing radiation, which kills or sickens those exposed, contaminates the environment, and has long-term health consequences for those who do not die right away.
- Acute radiation sickness can cause death within hours, days, or weeks; those who recover may remain ill for months or even years.
- Lower doses can cause leukemia, thyroid cancer, and many other cancers, even many years after exposure. Increased risk of cancer persists for the lifetime of those exposed.
- Radiation exposure also causes birth defects and genetic damage. Subsequent generations can suffer both because of genetic damage they inherit, as well as exposure to radioactivity from lingering radioactive contamination and fallout.
- Radioactive materials contaminate the soil, water, and the atmosphere.
- Depending on the type of radiation, hazards can last hundreds of thousands of years.
- There is no antidote to radiation exposure.

## **Nuclear famine and nuclear winter**

- A limited, regional nuclear conflict involving only 100 Hiroshima-size nuclear weapons would severely disrupt the global climate and agriculture for two decades or more.
- The resulting food shortages would place at least two billion people at risk of starvation. The effects of nuclear famine would hit hardest the people who are currently most affected by food insecurity, even if they are distant from the region of conflict; but no region would be spared.
- Use of the massive arsenals held by the United States and Russia can create a nuclear winter, destroying Earth's fundamental ecosystems, on which all life depends.
- These findings have profound implications. Use of nuclear weapons by any nation, with uncontrollable risks of escalation, would be suicidal. And not only the bloated arsenals of Russia and the US, but also the arsenals of UK, France, China, Israel, India and Pakistan pose an unparalleled global threat.

*This flier is adapted from "IPPNW Campaign Kit: The Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear War" <https://hinwcampaignkit.files.wordpress.com/2015/01/hinwcampaignkit.pdf> by International Physicians for Prevention of Nuclear War.*

## **NH Nuclear Weapons Working Group**

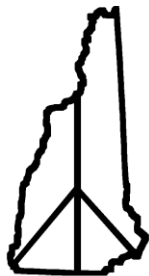
**facebook.com/NHNWWG**

**a project of**

**NH Peace Action**  
nhpeaceaction.org  
(603) 228-0559

**American Friends  
Service Committee**  
afsc.org/nh  
(603) 224-2407

and



WWW.NHPEACEACTION.ORG



**American Friends  
Service Committee**

**October 2018**