IHL ESSAY & ART COMPETITION

NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND ARMED CONFLICT

Volume 4, April 2024

American Red Cross | Youth Action Campaign

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2024 Essay & Art Competition Letter

On behalf of the entire American Red Cross and our International Humanitarian Law (IHL) Program, we are proud to present the top entries from our 2023-2024 Youth IHL Art and Essay Competition. With more than 100 armed conflicts currently raging around the world in places like Ukraine, Israel and Gaza, Yemen, and beyond, the role of IHL in helping to reduce suffering during wartime remains center stage in the global conscience. For more than a century, IHL has played a central role in helping preserve humanity during our darkest hours. Public awareness, appreciation, and support for these laws is equally vital. It is in this spirit that we annually host our IHL Youth Essay and Art Competition.

Each year, entrants are challenged to craft compelling essays and artistic creations to reflect the importance of IHL in reducing suffering during conflict. This year, entrants were asked to shape their work around the theme of "Nuclear Weapons and Armed Conflict," which has been the centerpiece of our global IHL Youth Action Campaign (YAC). This year, more than 1,500 youth IHL Advocates have learned more about the risks that nuclear weapons pose to humanity, as well as the ways in which international law deals with such destructive power. These IHL Advocates transform their knowledge into public education campaigns, helping teach their peers, families, and communities about IHL. The IHL Youth Essay and Art Competition is a key part of our youth outreach efforts, empowering young professionals from inside and outside the American Red Cross to help highlight the importance of these laws in protecting humanity.

We received a record number of entries this year, making the task of selecting top entries an incredibly difficult one. The entries in this magazine reflect the talent and dedication of young professionals in educating others about the importance of IHL today and in the future. We are excited to share their work widely and celebrate the hard work that went into each entry. May their passionate work inspire you to be a champion for IHL and its humanitarian aims.

Warm regards,

Thomas L. Harper

Senior Counsel, IHL, American Red Cross
Office of General Counsel

1ST

ESSAY

1ST PLACE

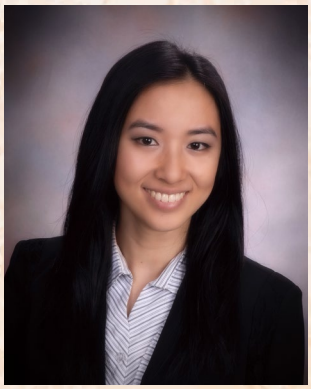
GRADUATE CATEGORY

WEAPONS OF WAR:

ARE YOU WORRIED OR ARE YOU READY?

BEVERLY TOMITA,

Carle Illinois College of Medicine, Urbana, IL



Beverly Tomita

"I will do no harm." The famous words from the Hippocratic Oath, a set of professional ethical standards that guides every physician (North 2012). Similarly, international humanitarian law (IHL) or the "law of war" is a set of rules that limits the devastation of armed conflict (ICRC 2022). Unfortunately, nuclear weapons undermine the IHL and violate the protection of civilian entities in its mass destruction. In the face of these daunting possibilities, there is still much we can do. This essay will explore the basics of nuclear weapons and their effects on living systems, the role of IHL in the context of nuclear warfare, and next steps in how we as Red Crossers may take action in the face of escalating international tensions.

IHL was initially adopted from the 1864 Geneva Convention and 1868 Declaration of St. Petersburg in order to ameliorate field conditions for the wounded and restrict certain projectile weapons in wartime, respectively. In 1949, the four Geneva Conventions ratified the core treaties of IHL, setting a precedent for additional treaties in the coming decades (ICRC 2022). Notably, nuclear weapons negotiations include the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (1968) and Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (2017). Before delving deeper, it is worth mentioning that while nuclear energy may be used in weapons of mass destruction, the same technology provides numerous benefits to humanity (ANS 2023), such as providing an alternative to burning fossil fuels.

The Basics of Nuclear Weapons

In order to appreciate the role of IHL on the use of nuclear weapons and armed conflict, one must first obtain a basic understanding of these devices and the magnitude of currently existing arsenals. According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2019), a nuclear weapon

U.S. President Harry Truman announces the end of World War II, September 1, 1945.

is any device using nuclear reactions to create an explosion. Nuclear reactions include fusion and fission reactions, resulting in the combination or splitting of atoms, respectively (Hall 2023). In the resulting explosion, four progressive forms of energy are released: [1] an *initial blast wave* that may cause barotrauma, such as rupturing a victim's lungs and eardrums, [2] *intense light* resulting in possible permanent blindness and igniting the surrounding atmosphere, [3] *extreme heat* leading severe burn injuries, and [4] *radiation exposure* leading to radiation sickness and contaminating food and water sources in the fallout phase (CDC 2019, Reed-Schrader 2023).

> LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF IONIZING RADIATION EXPOSURE MAY BE SEEN FROM THE MOLECULAR TO SYSTEMIC LEVEL.

The magnitude of arsenals released during WWII were 21 and 15 kiloton (kt) weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 (Hall 2023). By definition, a 10 kt yields an explosive force equivalent to 10,000 tons of TNT. At 100x that magnitude, a 1 megaton (Mt) nuclear weapon would have the peak energy output to reach 100 million degrees Celsius at its center, compared to the 6,000 °C on the surface of the sun (Solomon 1986). To visualize the immensity of this "fireball"

in a shell of superheated high-pressured gas, Solomon et al. described that a 1 Mt fireball over Baltimore at a high enough altitude would likely be visible from the distance of Washington DC, several times brighter than the noon day sun. In 1961, Russia tested their 50 Mt Tsar Bomb (Hall 2023). As recently as 2022, the global nuclear warhead inventories estimate 13,000 warheads in possession worldwide (Xu 2023). Thus, despite the efforts of IHL treaties mentioned above, nuclear weapons continue to exist as looming threats.

Short-Term and Long-Term Physiologic Effects of a Nuclear Attack

Even in the most prepared cities and hospital systems, mass casualty incident (MCI) responses only have finite capacities. Xu et al (2023) used Detroit in a hypothetical nuclear attack to illustrate the immensity of medical supplies and resources that would be required for the MCI response. Thus, clinical and nonclinical responders must maintain skills for MCI disaster preparedness. From a medical perspective, what exactly are the short-term and long-term effects on living systems resulting from nuclear weapons?

Blast injuries resulting in thermobaric trauma are often described sequentially. In the primary blast injury, a pressure wave immediately impacts its victim resulting in pulmonary barotrauma — lung damage from over-pressurization — the most common cause of fatality. Secondary injury includes penetrating trauma from flying shrapnel and debris. These injuries are a great concern, especially in an open environment (Reed-Schrader 2023). Tertiary injury is often blunt trauma from throwing the victim against a standing rigid surface, and quaternary injury includes all other damage such as crushing or burns (Solomon 1986). Thus, immediate care following a blast and its firestorms would require the trauma teams equipped for wound care, resuscitation, and life support.

Long-term effects of ionizing radiation exposure may be seen from the molecular to systemic level. Within a single cell, radiation can directly damage a cell's genetic material, such as in single-stranded, double-stranded, or cluster DNA damage (O'Neill 2021). In the classic example of an inherited

> IN A RIPPLE EFFECT, PERHAPS THE SPIRIT OF IHL FOR THE GREATER GOOD MAY STILL PERMEATE ALL LEVELS OF LEADERSHIP IN TIMES OF CONFLICT.

malfunctioning DNA repair system, xeroderma pigmentosum results in severe burns simply from sunlight radiation. Imagine a vampire burning in the sun! DNA mutations are then passed down or result in eventual cell death. Significant free radical damage also poses a threat to the integrity of cell membranes and even cellular metabolic pathways (Melis 2013).

Zooming out from the cellular level, this damage increases risk of cancers like papillary thyroid carcinoma, leukemias, and osteosarcoma (Solomon 1986). Some good news: modern treatment options make many of these cancers treatable. In addition, Kitamura et al (2023) found that prenatal radiation exposure does not cause significant neurocognitive decline later in life. Taken together, the greatest threats to one's health in a large nuclear attack would be not so much in managing long-term medical complications, but in surviving the initial explosion, handling a severely overloaded MCI response system, and navigating other factors not discussed, such as obtaining clean food and water.

> FROM THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF SAFETY'S "ODDS OF DYING" (2023), FATALITY RISK FROM A NATURAL CATACLYSMIC STORM IS 1 IN 20,098, COMPARED TO A MOTOR VEHICLE COLLISION 1 IN 93, OR HEART DISEASE AT 1 IN 6.

International Humanitarian Law as a Guide for Greater Good

The International Committee of the Red Cross (2022) unequivocally explains: "Persons protected by IHL are entitled to respect for their lives, their dignity, and their physical and mental integrity." This includes "persons who are not, or are no longer, directly or actively participating in hostilities." However, Xu et al (2023) argue that "So long as nuclear weapons exist, it is inevitable that someday they will be used, whether by design, accident, or miscalculation." This is the terrifying threat known to many generations since the advent of these weapons of mass destruction.

Fortunately, no nuclear weapons have been used in armed conflict since 1945 despite escalating numbers of conflicts internationalized over the past decade, now reaching 55 state-based conflicts with 22 of those internationalized (Obermeier 2023). This translates to nearly 80 years of respect for the increasingly elaborate IHL treaties and self-restraint of countries' leaders holding their share of the 13,000 warheads in the global inventory. Commonly deployed missiles include Tomahawk Cruise Missiles, recently used in the US attack on Yemen in the Israel-Hamas War (Cooper 2024), with capabilities of carrying 1 ton to 200 kt warheads (Missile 2023). While currently far from the magnitude of a megaton nuclear arsenal, it only takes one world leader to defy IHL to wreak havoc. What can we do as Red Crossers to alleviate anxieties as global tensions continue to rise?

An approach to stay active is the "see one, do one, and teach one" framework adapted from medical education (Ayub 2022). Initially, the "see one" phase is where we learn the basics. There is a plethora of free online resources, including the IHL Foundation Courses (American 2024) and courses from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (2015), starting with ICS 100. Perhaps professional training into a new career is not a far leap.

In the "do one" phase, it's time to get involved personally: students may engage in the Youth Action Campaign activities like this essay contest! All may register for Red Cross IHL webinars like "Ukraine War 2nd Anniversary: A Reflection & Look Ahead" on February 23, 2024.

Also, consider the statistics. From the National Council of Safety's "Odds of Dying" (2023), fatality risk from a natural cataclysmic storm is 1 in 20,098, compared to a motor vehicle collision 1 in 93, or heart disease at 1 in 6. In comparison, the chances of suffering a nuclear attack at an exact city, state, and time is near zero. Thus, it may be most sensible to equip ourselves with knowledge but then focus our energies on healthy living.

Finally, the "teach one" phase gives back to the community. Volunteering as an IHL instructor is just one way to get involved. After reading this, maybe it's time to consult the Nobel Peace Prize-winning ICAN for nuclear war anxiety coping skills, site linked in the references (ICAN 2023), to check in with family and friends. Among the myriad of actions, the most important task is to be the change you want to see. In a ripple effect, perhaps the spirit of IHL for the greater good may still permeate all levels of leadership in times of conflict.

1ST

ESSAY

1ST PLACE

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

FALLING SNOW:

A HISTORICAL REFLECTION OF UNITED STATES NUCLEAR TESTING IN THE MARSHALL ISLANDS

MAHATHI TALLAPRAGADA,
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Mahathi Tallapragada

> FIVE HOURS AFTER DETONATION, IT BEGAN TO RAIN RADIOACTIVE FALLOUT AT RONGELAP. THE ATOLL WAS COVERED WITH A FINE, WHITE, POWDER-LIKE SUBSTANCE. NO ONE KNEW IT WAS RADIOACTIVE FALLOUT. THE CHILDREN PLAYED IN THE 'SNOW.' THEY ATE IT."
>
> *– Jeton Anjain, Senator of the Marshall Islands Parliament*

Nuclear weapons testing has been a source of global controversy since 1945, when the first explosion occurred in Alamogordo, New Mexico, sparking an international race among nations to establish themselves as a nuclear power.[1] As tensions rose between the United States and the Soviet Union in the years leading up to the Cold War, the Nuclear Arms race joined the many demonstrations of rivalry between the two states. However, as the states pushed for the rapid development of their nuclear weapons, the need for testing these

Baker nuclear test explosion, Bikini Atoll, 1946.

devices led to the establishment of nuclear programs in remote areas of other nations. These programs typically infringed on the territory of rural, minority, or colonised people, such as the Nenetz people of Kazakhstan where the Soviet tests had taken place, or the atolls of the Marshall Islands in the Pacific Ocean where the native Marshallese were forcibly evicted relocated away from their home islands.[2]

The Pacific bomb tests conducted by the United States resulted in a host of health and environmental consequences imposed upon the Marshallese people as their islands were obliterated, their waters poisoned, and lethal levels of radiation were carried over from the explosion sites.[3] These effects are still being felt by survivors and their descendants today. While the Marshallese have had some legal successes in achieving recognition and reparations for property damage and health issues, there is still much to be done to ensure that they are able to attain adequate justice.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) supports the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which advocates for the prevention of nuclear weapons, weapons technology, and the knowledge of such devices.[4] Humanitarian and environmental crises such as the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, and the long history of nuclear testing, especially within the Pacific Islands, have been key arguments for the push against the use of nuclear weapons. The use of nuclear weapons has also been thought to violate the fundamental principles of IHL.

> THE EFFECTS OF THE UNITED STATES' NUCLEAR WEAPONS TESTING OVER THE PAST EIGHTY YEARS HAVE HAD DESTRUCTIVE OUTCOMES UPON THE MARSHALL ISLANDS AND ITS PEOPLE.

History of Testing in the Marshall Islands

Bikini Atoll, one the most well-known sites of nuclear testing, is a group of 23 islands in the Northern Marshall Islands.[5] After defeating Japanese troops on the Marshall Islands, the United States military built bases on several atolls and took advantage of the remoteness of the Islands to begin nuclear testing programs in the area.6 Nuclear testing at Bikini Atoll began in July 1946, one year after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and comprised of two main tests, Able and Baker.7 While a third test, Charlie, was scheduled, it was indefinitely postponed due to concerns about the military value of the projects.[8]

The first test, called Able, was deemed a disappointment as media observers were not able to view much of the proceedings, although three ships were still destroyed by the blast.9 The following Baker test was decisively more impressive, yielding a massive column of water, raining fallout onto several ships.[10] Later, in 1954, the Castle Bravo test was launched, a bomb a thousand times larger than the one that was dropped on Hiroshima, which caused the vapourisation of three islands and caused fallout to blow towards inhabited islands, causing incredible levels of damage upon the islands and their peoples.[11]

Environmental Impacts

There were many environmental impacts that resulted from the testing of nuclear weapons in the Marshall Islands. Three islands in Bikini Atoll were completely vapourised and radioactive fallout spread through the air and water throughout the Northern Marshall Islands.[12] The fallout appeared like snow, as a thick white powder that rained upon the people, who unknowingly played in the "snow" that coated their islands, seeping into their water and soil.[13] This has led to extremely high levels of radiation in the area and in an attempt to clean-up the radioactivity, an enormous concrete dome, known as the Runit Dome, was constructed to hold contaminated soil, vegetation, and debris.[14] However, the Dome has shown signs of leakage, which has led to substantial increase in contamination in the lagoon in which it is located, affecting the local marine life. The environmental effect of the testing has widespread and severe environmental damages that will continue to affect the Marshall Islands for hundreds of years.

Health Impacts

Many of the Marshallese were not properly informed or evacuated from their islands when the threat of fallout became apparent. As a result, the people faced near-lethal doses of radiation exposure that has led to symptoms such as thyroid diseases, beta radiation burns, birth defects, and an astronomically high cancer rate.[15] Instead of focusing on patient care for those affected by radiation exposure, people from Rongelap became the test subjects of a study about the perceived impacts of exposure without their informed consent. The study, popularly known as Project 4.1, led to the Rongelapese being given what they were told was medical treatment for their exposure, although they were not informed of any tests taking place or why they were being prescribed a certain medication.[16]

In addition to the health repercussions that arose from diffusion of fallout, instances of malnutrition became prevalent through the relocation of affected peoples to other islands where there were food shortages, overcrowding, and changes to traditional diets.[17] When people

were finally allowed to move back to their home islands, the soil was not fit for the safe production of food, and the fish in the area were dangerous to consume.[18] This created a limit on local food consumption, dependence on Western food imports, and regulations for proximity to radioactive areas to prevent people from being further exposed to radiation.[19] Not only were the Marshallese evicted from their homes, subjected to dangerous levels of radiation exposure, and forced to adapt to newer and less nutritious diets, but they had to consider their cultural relationship, as they could no longer interact with their land and their resources as they once did.

Nuclear Weapons and IHL

The use of nuclear weapons comes under heavy scrutiny as it submits to the purview of International Humanitarian Law. Several issues arise as the consequences of nuclear weapons are examined in accordance with the four Fundamental Principles of IHL, which include the principles of military necessity, distinction, proportionality, and the limitation of unnecessary suffering.[20] The ICRC argues that nuclear weapons would not protect civilians and other protected people within range of the bomb's effect, causes unprecedented environmental and health issues to the bombed area for an extended period, and causes painful and unnecessary suffering before death to those caught in the explosion and in the radioactive fallout that occurs after.[21]

> THE ENVIRONMENT HAS BEEN SUBJECTED TO UNSUSTAINABLE LEVELS OF RADIATION THAT MADE THE ISLANDS INHOSPITABLE, POLLUTING THE WATER AND SOIL, WHILE HARMING THE LOCAL BIODIVERSITY.

When nuclear weapons are set off in an area, they destroy everything within the blast radius. This would decimate not only military holdings, but any protected structures in the area, including any hospitals, Prisoner of War camps, and civilian homes and buildings. Thus, not only does the detonation of a nuclear weapon fail to serve a purely military purpose, but it also fails to provide a distinction between targetable and protected objects, violating the principles of military necessity and distinction. Even if the area being targeted for a nuclear weapon attack did have a military advantage, the total destruction of nearby civilian objects and the potential for civilians even hundreds of miles away to feel the environmental and health issues of the subsequent radioactive fallout leads to the concerns of civilian safety and well-being to outweigh any potential military benefits of the attack, according to the principle of proportionality. And, the pollution of food and water sources, and the health impacts that being exposed to a nuclear attack may lead to causes a stark decrease in quality of living for a prolonged time for all those affected, which flouts the principle of unnecessary suffering. Hence, the use of nuclear weapons has no military necessity that would outweigh the potential consequences inflicted upon civilians as it pertains to the rules of war outlined in IHL.

Conclusion

The effects of the United States' nuclear weapons testing over the past eighty years have had destructive outcomes upon the Marshall Islands and its people. The environment has been subjected to unsustainable levels of radiation that made the islands inhospitable, polluting the water and soil, while harming the local biodiversity. This has led to numerous health problems in the Marshallese people, including abnormally high rates of cancers, thyroid issues, and malnutrition due to being deprived of traditional food sources. The effects of nuclear weapons as imposed on the Marshallese have demonstrated how the use of nuclear weapons violates the four Fundamental Principles of International Humanitarian Law and how we should adhere to the Non-Proliferation Treaty and take steps to minimising the presence and knowledge of nuclear weapons in our global society.

2ND

ESSAY

2ND PLACE

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

THE LEGACY OF HIROSHIMA AND NAGASAKI:

THE LONG-TERM HUMANITARIAN IMPACT OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS IN ARMED CONFLICTS

CARA ELZIE,

Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ

Cara Elzie

On August 6, 1945, the United States, led by President Truman, dropped the first atomic bomb, known as Little Boy, on Hiroshima, Japan, killing between 70,000 and 140,000 people (Gaulkin, 2023). Just three days later, on August 9th, another atomic bomb, Fat Man, was dropped on Nagasaki, killing an additional 40,000 to 70,000 people (Gaulkin, 2023). The long-term effects of these bombs are still felt by the civilians of Japan. Today, thousands ofpeople are still suffering from being "collateral damage" of these atomic bomb attacks (*Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings*).

Hiroshima was chosen intentionally, in part due to its flat geography. This flatness would allow the bomb, if detonated correctly at the proper altitude, to destroy nearly the entirety of the city. It did. When Little Boy detonated, it unleashed the force of over 15,000 tons of TNT. This detonation occurred directly above a surgical clinic (*The Most Fearsome Sight: The Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima*). This devastation was captured by the crew of the camera plane, *Necessary Evil*, which accompanied the strike plane, *Enola Gay*, to Hiroshima (*Hiroshima and Nagasaki Missions - Planes & Crews*).The ground level temperature reached 7,000°F in under a second. Even half a mile away from ground zero, the bomb was able to vaporize people and melt bronze statues. Tens of thousands of people died instantly, with thousands more suffering horrific injuries, including intense burns from the infrared energy the bomb unleashed (*The Most Fearsome Sight: The Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima*).

These burns were found even on individuals that were miles away from ground zero.

The story of Kunihiko Iida's life clearly illustrates the stark realities of those who lived through these bombings. Iida was just three years old at the time that he lived through the atomic bomb being dropped on Hiroshima and, according to a 2020 article, "his injuries left him bedridden for years, and he has suffered debilitating illnesses ever since. Childhood anemia caused him to collapse at school. He's had ulcers and asthma, underwent two surgeries to remove brain tumors, and now has thyroid growths. 'There has never been a break in these illnesses,' he says" (Normile). This is just one story that is representative of a much larger trend: according to the International Committee of the Red Cross, "childhood survivors of the bombings have… experienced a trend of suffering from multiple types of cancer" (2020). Often these cancers each develop independently, over the course of multiple decades (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2020). This occurs because "exposure of the entire body to radiation at the time of the bombing [causes] damage to stem cells in multiple organs which… can produce abnormal cells that become cancerous" (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2020).

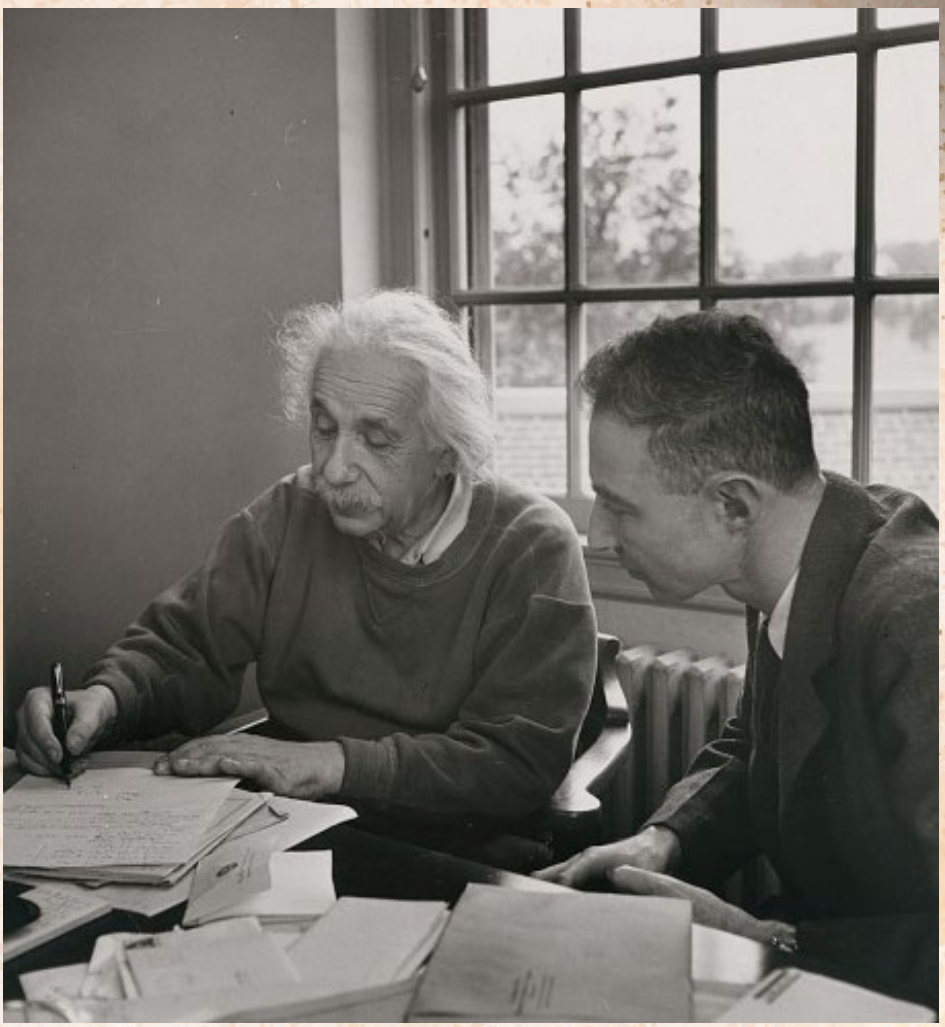
> THE LANDSCAPE OF WAR FOREVER CHANGED WITH THE INVENTION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS. LITTLE BOYAND FAT MAN INTRODUCED THE WORLD TO NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND SHOWCASED THEIR POTENTIAL FORDEVASTATION AND THEIR ABILITY TO INFLUENCE WARFARE.

Historical records indicate that "neither Truman nor any of his advisors ever debated *if* the atomic bombs should be used, only *how* and *where* they should be used" (*The Most Fearsome Sight: The Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima*). Despite the estimates from early testing of the potentially devastating destruction, the decision to use the bomb was made with little discussion on Truman's part of what the long-term impact might be on the civilian populations. In his work on the creation of the atomic bomb under the Manhattan Project, "Oppenheimer and the brain trust he assembled… calculated the possibility that an atomic explosion could ignite all the hydrogen in the oceans or the nitrogen in the atmosphere" (Kuznick, 2013). Had this possibility become reality, the unending nuclear chain reaction of all the world's hydrogen and/or nitrogen igniting could have destroyed the world. Arthur Holly Compton, a Nobel Prize-winning physicist, believed that if there was even a small chance this was true, the bomb should never be made, as the risk of "drawing the final curtain on mankind" was too great a risk to take (Kuznick, 2013).

In spite of, or perhaps because of, the way Hiroshima and Nagasaki crystallized the destructive capacity of nuclear weapons, a nuclear arms race began in the years after World War II. The Soviet Union was the first to follow in the United States' footsteps, successfully conducting their first nuclear test in 1949, just four years after World War II ended (*Nuclear Weapons: Who Has What At A Glance)*. The United Kingdom, France, and China followed, in 1952, 1960, and 1964, respectively (*Nuclear Weapons: Who Has What At A Glance*). These developments prompted "the United States and other like-minded countries to negotiate the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1968 and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) in 1996" (*Nuclear Weapons: Who Has What At A Glance*).

Clearly, the International Humanitarian Law (IHL) principle of distinction is in violation when

looking at the impact of the nuclear radiation the atomic bombs released on the civilian populations of Nagasaki and Hiroshima. According to Columbia University, the most deadly long-term effect suffered by atomic bomb survivors is leukemia, which was seen most severely in children; "Attributable risk—the percent difference in the incidence rate of a condition between an exposed population and a comparable unexposed one — reveals how great of an effect radiation had on leukemia incidences. The Radiation Effects Research Foundation estimates the attributable risk of leukemia to be 46% for bomb victims" (Listwa, 2012). Today, Red Cross societies, including the Japanese Red Cross and the ICRC, are still treating patients that are suffering from continued residual effects of these bombs, over 70 years after the fact. Aside from the overt physical impact of the bombs, survivors of the nuclear attacks have also suffered negative psychological effects and social discrimination. A study done by the World Health Organization (WHO), found "lasting psychological instability, including depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)" (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2020). In Japan, *hibakusha* - the Japanese name for survivors of the atomic bombs - and their children suffer social discrimination and stigmatization in all areas of life, reaching from the workplace to dating (Normile, 2020). One woman, Michiko Kodama, who was seven at the time the bomb went off in Hiroshima, shared that years later she suffered workplace discrimination and was not allowed to marry a man she dated due to his mother's fear that "*hibakusha* [have] the blood of the devil" (Normile, 2020). The war may have ended, yet the long term effects on Japanese survivors are ongoing and there is still not a full understanding of the long-term effects of nuclear weapon's radiation on survivors' bodies.



Albert Einstein & J. Robert Oppenheimer, 1947.

Like the IHL principle of distinction, the principle of proportionality is also violated by the use of nuclear weapons. Mass civilian casualties, like those seen in Hiroshima and Nagaski, are examples of the principle of proportionality being violated, and

> A REPORT PUBLISHED BY TIME MAGAZINE IN 2023 PROJECTS THAT NUCLEAR WAR COULD CREATE DRASTIC CLIMATE CONDITIONS AND CITES A RESEARCH PAPER IN WHICH IT IS ESTIMATED 5 MILLION PEOPLE IN THE NORTHERN HEMISPHERE ALONE COULD STARVE TO DEATH DUE TO THESE DRASTIC CONDITIONS (TEGMARK, 2023).

would be illegal today under IHL (McKinney et al.). Despite this evidence that the principles of IHL are in violation by the use of nuclear weapons, there is still support for their use. This support can be seen not only in the continued creation of nuclear weapons today, but also in discussions about past nuclear weapons' use. For example, in 2018, the last surviving member of the plane crew that flew over Hiroshima that day proudly proclaimed that he had "no regrets" about the decision to drop the bomb (Gilles). Others, however, have seen the lasting impact of these bombs and reacted quite differently, calling for stricter armistice controls, with some organizations calling for a ban on all nuclear weapons, like the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), which was founded in 2007 (Hawkins et al., 2019). Despite the reality that intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) can now carry nuclear warheads globally in a matter of minutes (*New START Treaty - United States Department of State*), and yield years of lasting effect on continents and societies thousands of miles away, the world is continuing to stockpile nuclear weapons.

According to the Arms Control Association, as of 2023 there are over 12,500 nuclear weapons in existence today, with Russia and the United States leading the total weapons count by a large margin (*Nuclear Weapons: Who Has What At A Glance*). The next highest, China, still sits over 5,000 weapons behind the United States. When looking at the immense levels of damage done by just two nuclear bombs during World War II, the damage that could be inflicted by countless numbers of nuclear weapons is difficult to comprehend. A report published by Time Magazine in 2023 projects that nuclear war could create drastic climate conditions and cites a research paper in which it is estimated 5 million people in the Northern Hemisphere alone could starve to death due to these drastic conditions (Tegmark, 2023).

The landscape of war forever changed with the invention of nuclear weapons. Little Boyand Fat Man introduced the world to nuclear weapons and showcased their potential fordevastation and their ability to influence warfare. They also showed that an uninhabitable worldis more than possible in the years following their use. However, today cities like Hiroshima andNagasaki stand as testaments to human strength and the potential for revival, even in the wake ofstaggering tragedy. In 1945, many believed that the transformation of Hiroshima and Nagaskiinto a nuclear wasteland was inevitable (Listwa, 2012), however, their populations perseveredand today the two cities have larger populations than they did in 1950. As well as symbols ofrebirth, they also stand as stark reminders of the ongoing damage nuclear weapons have - andcontinue to - cause.

1ST

ESSAY

1ST PLACE

UPPER HIGH SCHOOL

NUCLEAR WEAPONS:

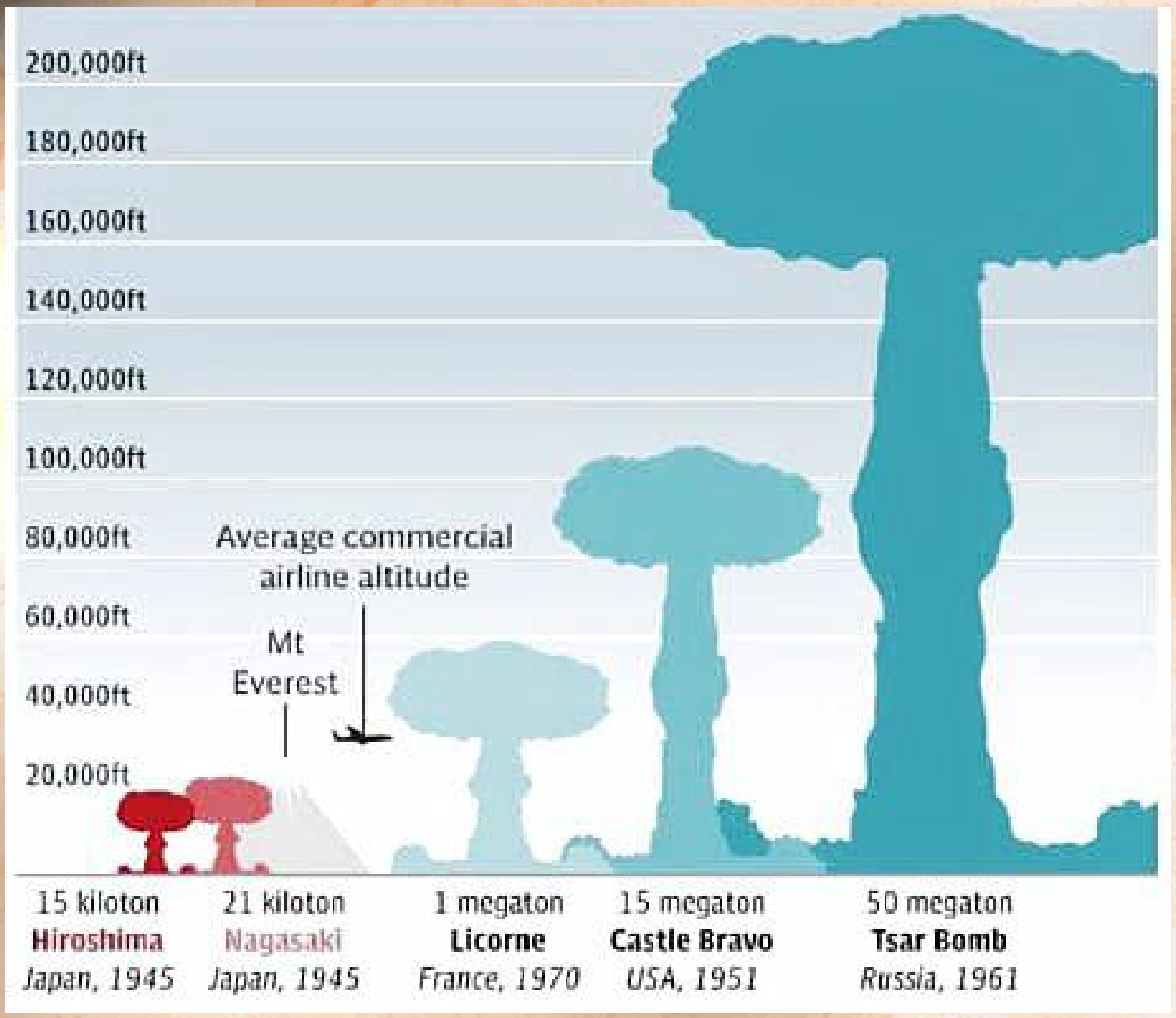
How Education Leads to a Safe Future

Emma Noss,

Avonworth High School, Grade 11, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Emma Noss

The Collins Dictionary defines a nuclear weapon as "an explosive device whose destructive potential derives from the release of energy that accompanies the splitting or combining of atomic nuclei" [1]. In contrast, the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) defines nuclear weapons as "the most dangerous weapons on earth" (UNODA). Though Oxford Languages' precise technical definition may be correct, UNODA's informal definition is perhaps more representative of society's thoughts. Nuclear weapons have only been used in warfare once: the U.S.'s atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II, and the effects were devastating. The bomb dropped on Hiroshima killed 80,000 people in an instant, while many died later of radiation poisoning, and most of the city's structures were totally destroyed (Bamford). Although nuclear weapons have not been used since they remain a subject at the forefront of international relations. North Korean Supreme Leader Kim Jong-Un recently promised in a press conference to "produce more nuclear materials" to be "war-ready" because of "U.S.-led confrontational moves"[2]. Additionally, with Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its many violations of international law, many wonder if Russian President Vladimir Putin will use nuclear weapons against Ukraine (International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons). In the international discussion of nuclear weapons and their use, the majority of countries, groups, and people agree that the devastating effects of nuclear weapons outweigh any possible benefits. Despite this informal ideological agreement, there is no effective ban in place on the use of nuclear weapons, so organizations



and individuals must continue to recognize and learn about nuclear weapons to force the international community to come to a definite conclusion on their use.

Nuclear weapons have both positive and negative effects, though many agree that their negative effects outweigh any benefits. On the positive side, the use of atomic bombs resulted in a swift end to World War II, considered one of the deadliest world conflicts to date (Imperial War Museums). After the deployment of the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Japanese government quickly signed the terms of surrender less than a month later, finally ending World War II. Possessing atomic bombs could also demonstrate the strength of a particular nation, possibly preventing a conflict against that nation. However, nuclear weapons also have disastrous consequences that cannot be ignored. In an instant, the use of a nuclear weapon on a city will kill many of its civilian inhabitants and destroy most of the buildings (International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons). Destruction on this scale is extremely costly and time-consuming to recover from, especially as the effects of nuclear weapons spread with no regard for national borders.

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Nuclear weapons also have detrimental long-term effects on individual citizens and the world they live in that transcend arbitrary lines on a map. Exposure to the radiation that they produce can cause long-term health issues for humans, such as cancer or genetic defects. Furthermore, radiation disproportionately affects women and children. A child's cells divide at a much faster rate than adults; therefore, they have an increased risk of cancer due to radiation exposure. Women have more reproductive tissue, known to be very susceptible to radiation (Olson). As for the environment, even a "small-scale" use of nuclear weapons would lead to detrimental ecological effects, such as global cooling, and shorter growing seasons that would lead to food shortages and famine (International Committee of the Red Cross). In addition, the constant threat of nuclear warfare can negatively affect people's mental health. Psychologists anecdotally note that they have seen more anxiety over nuclear war, particularly in the U.S., even "among clients who haven't previously experienced such symptoms" (Lybarger). There are many more consequences of the use or threat of nuclear weapons than there are positives. Due to the catastrophic effects of nuclear weapons on humanity's physical and mental health, the environment, and our society far outweigh their benefits, the International Court of Justice makes the "ambiguous conclusions that 'the threat or use of nuclear weapons would generally be contrary to the rules and principles of international law applicable in armed conflict, and in particular the principles of international humanitarian law'" (International Committee of the Red Cross). Although the International Committee of Justice has faced criticism for adding that is is unsure if the use of nuclear weapons is legal in "extreme circumstance[s] of self-defense" (International Committee of the Red Cross), it does clearly state that the use of nuclear weapons is typically against the International Humanitarian Law because of their detrimental effects.

Because of the negative effects of nuclear weapons, international organizations are working to restrict their use. Currently, there are only partial prohibitions on their uses: Latin American and African countries have signed a treaty for "the prohibition to test, use, manufacture, produce, acquire, receive, stockpile, install, locate and possess nuclear weapons in a stated region" (International Committee of the Red Cross). Several treaties also prohibit their parties from storing or testing nuclear weapons in the ocean or space. Members of the U.N. have joined the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the goal of which is to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons technology (UNODA), and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which prohibits nuclear weapon activities but does not lay out a system for ensuring compliance with the treaty (UNODA). Therefore, a comprehensive nuclear weapons ban does not exist yet, but one is in progress. The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) would ban nuclear explosions by all countries in all components of the world: on land, in the ocean, or in the air (The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization). The treaty, once ratified, has a plan to ensure that member countries stick to it. The

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treaty is not yet in full effect, as ten countries still have to sign it and twenty still have to ratify it. Since the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty opened for signing in 1996, nuclear tests "have been conducted on only 10 occasions" (CTBTO), demonstrating that there is a global norm against the use of nuclear weapons. However, changing a shared global opinion to a definite law will require more awareness and education about nuclear weapons.

A nuclear-weapon-free future requires education about nuclear weapons. There are two international days created by the U.N. relating to nuclear weapons: August 29th, International Day Against Nuclear Tests (United Nations), and September 26th, International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons (United Nations). These days are useful for spreading awareness, particularly via social media, which thrives on quick information like international days. However, because they are only two days out of the year, the conversation about nuclear weapons quickly escapes from the public consciousness. To combat this, education about nuclear weapons must take place in a centralized place: schools. I am in eleventh grade, just over one year away from graduating and beginning to forge my own path in the world. However, throughout many years of history class, I cannot recall learning about the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in World War II, or any existence of nuclear weapons beyond the Cold War. I certainly did not learn about nuclear weapons to an extent that fosters further conversation about their use and consequences in the present day. It is only because of my interest in history at a young age that I have learned about nuclear weapons and formed a view on their usage. The most effective way to educate the population about nuclear weapons and their consequences is in schools, where young people can learn the facts at an age-appropriate level. In middle school, students should learn general facts about the effects of nuclear weapons, and why the IHL prohibits them. Then, students continue their education on nuclear weapons in high school by learning about specific historical instances of their usage and effects such as Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Additionally, high schoolers can think through the nuanced argument about whether or not the use of nuclear weapons is justified in self-defense. Students who are well-educated about nuclear weapons will grow to become an informed society that can vote and take political action to achieve the safe, nuclear-weapons-free future that we deserve.

Nuclear weapons are incredibly dangerous and have many harmful effects on human, societal, and environmental health. Although there are some partial prohibitions in place, there is not yet a comprehensive ban on nuclear weapons. If ratified, the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty would ban all nuclear explosions in all areas (CTBTO). The treaty is extremely close to ratification, demonstrating a global norm that agrees with the IHL's stance against nuclear weapons. Finally, because awareness-spreading days quickly escape the public consciousness, education about the effects of nuclear weapons must be prioritized in schools. Then, if students can graduate with a knowledge base about nuclear weapons, they will work to achieve a safe, peaceful, and healthy future for everyone, everywhere.

2ND

ESSAY

2ND PLACE

Upper High School

NUCLEAR WEAPONS:

How Education Leads to a Safe Future

Mayank Sharma,

Scripps Ranch High School, San Diego, CA

Mayank Sharma

The Collins Dictionary defines a nuclear weapon as "an explosive device whose destructive potential derives from the release of energy that accompanies the splitting or combining of atomic nuclei" [1]. In contrast, the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) defines nuclear weapons as "the most dangerous weapons on earth" (UNODA). Though Oxford Languages' precise technical definition may be correct, UNODA's informal definition is perhaps more representative of society's thoughts. Nuclear weapons have only been used in warfare once: the U.S.'s atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II, and the effects were devastating. The bomb dropped on Hiroshima killed 80,000 people in an instant, while many died later of radiation poisoning, and most of the city's structures were totally destroyed (Bamford). Although nuclear weapons have not been used since they remain a subject at the forefront of international relations. North Korean Supreme Leader Kim Jong-Un recently promised in a press conference to "produce more nuclear materials" to be "war-ready" because of "U.S.-led confrontational moves"[2]. Additionally, with Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its many violations of international law, many wonder if Russian President Vladimir Putin will use nuclear weapons against Ukraine (International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons). In the international discussion of nuclear weapons and their use, the majority of countries, groups, and people agree that the devastating effects of nuclear weapons outweigh any possible benefits. Despite this informal ideological agreement, there is no effective ban in place on the use of nuclear weapons, so organizations and individuals must continue to recognize and learn

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Nuclear weapons are incredibly dangerous and have many harmful effects on human, societal, and environmental health. Although there are some partial prohibitions in place, there is not yet a comprehensive ban on nuclear weapons. If ratified, the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty would ban all nuclear explosions in all areas (CTBTO). The treaty is extremely close to ratification, demonstrating a global norm that agrees with the IHL's stance against nuclear weapons. Finally, because awareness-spreading days quickly escape the public consciousness, education about the effects of nuclear weapons must be prioritized in schools. Then, if students can graduate with a knowledge base about nuclear weapons, they will work to achieve a safe, peaceful, and healthy future for everyone, everywhere.

ESSAY

HONORABLE MENTION

Upper High School

THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW IN THE PROHIBITION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Christopher Zhu,
Jericho High School, Jericho, NY

Christopher Zhu

"I found myself pinned under the collapsed building in total silence, total darkness," she said. "I tried to move my body, but I couldn't, so I knew I was faced with death … Then I started hearing faint voices of my classmates: 'Mother, help me.' 'God, help me.' "She knew she was not alone. "Then all of a sudden someone started shaking my left shoulder from behind — a strong male voice: 'Don't give up! Don't give up! Keep moving! Keep kicking! Keep pushing!'" He told her to crawl toward the light" ("A living"). 87 year old Setsuko Nakamura vividly describes her unforgettable experiences during the Hiroshima bombing of World War II, the first time nuclear weapons were used in warfare: it instantly claimed the lives of 80,000 people and wiped out 90% of the population of Hiroshima. Nakamura discusses the difficulty that comes with carrying the memories from the attack on Hiroshima, reflecting on how she was desensitized to the point where she "learned to step over dead bodies" (Levine). The trauma that stems from living through nuclear warfare was everlasting and survivors of the Hiroshima bombing were left in an "environment of devastation for people with little hope, and for whom food and other relief supplies were scarce [...] prostitution, gang-related crime, suicides, and other deaths unrelated to the bombing skyrocketed" (Martinez).

However, there was a different kind of psychological trauma prominent during the Cold War

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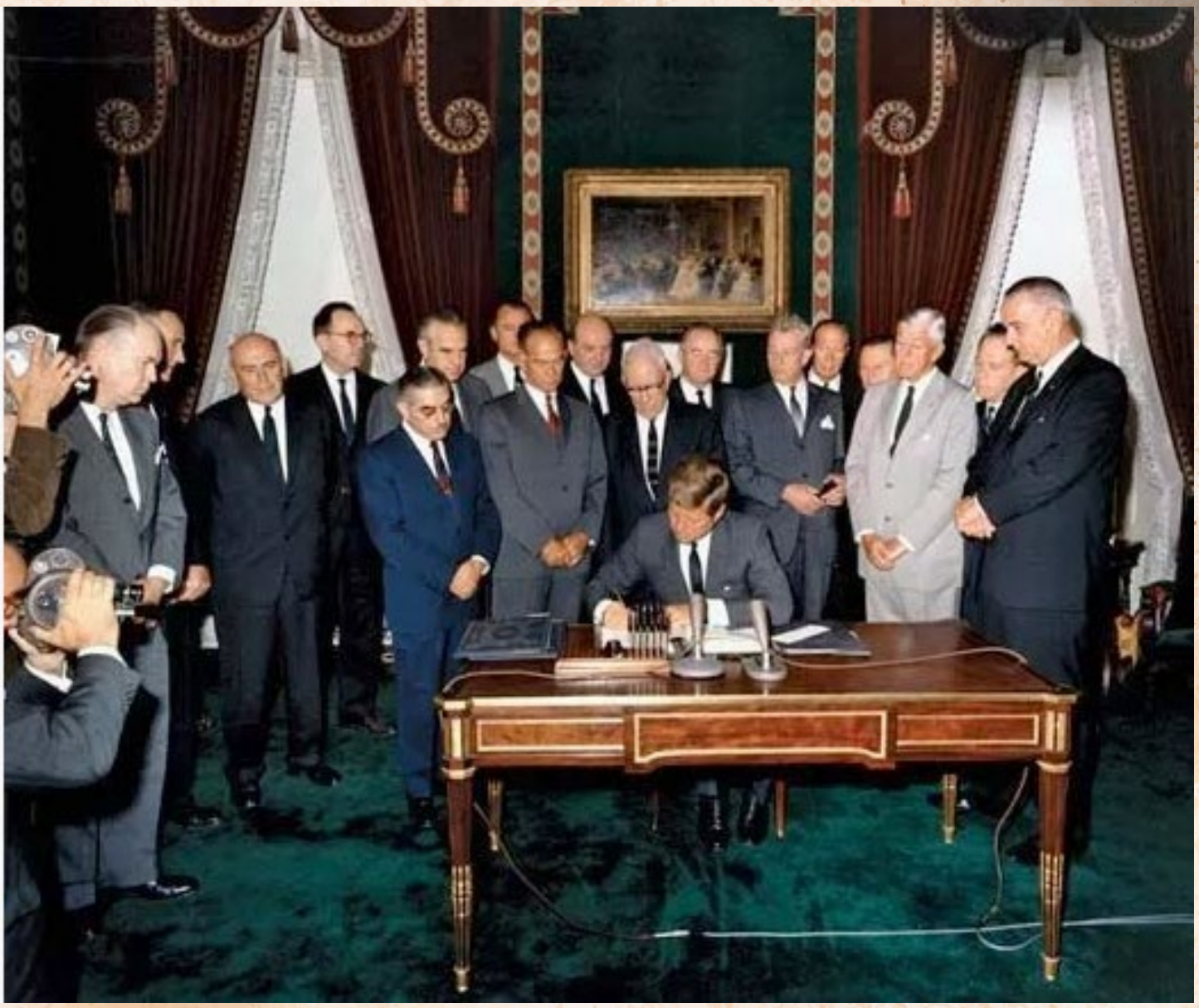
period for those in the United States. Ever since nuclear weapons were being utilized during war-time, Americans were aware of their potential for destruction and they knew that at any time, they could be destroyed: it became a constant and prominent fear in society. It was impossible to avoid the news, impossible to be oblivious to the political and social tension, impossible to not feel the anxiety everyone felt. The anxiety stemming from this issue has caused further psychological damages and mental health issues for not only the children, but for all people living in this era. Ropeik, an author who lived through the Cuban Missile Crisis -- the event of highest tension during the Cold War -- recalls that "there were only three [tv] channels, and it was all they talked about" (King). He also describes the varying effects that growing up during this period had on kids when he states that "children's observations about how adults coped with the threat of nuclear war had a significant effect on how trustworthy they perceived the adult world to be" (King). Clearly, this testimony by Ropeik, which describes his own firsthand experience as a child living through this difficult and terrifying time, exemplifies the unique psyche of Americans as fears of nuclear warfare circulate society.

The generations of people on this Earth today will, luckily, probably never have to experience these forms of trauma, all thanks to International Humanitarian Law (IHL). Specifically, the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), declares that "Nuclear weapons are, as of now, unlawful to possess, develop, deploy, test, use, or threaten to use" ("Nuclear weapons are prohibited under international law"). In other words, this recently adopted treaty finally put a ban on the use of nuclear weapons, protecting the world from the destruction and tragedy. This piece of law sets the basis for our world today while also setting a precedent for future legislation passed on this matter: it will become an influential piece, shaping how each government may eventually treat IHL. Although this treaty has been ratified by 50 countries, the countries which pose the most threat have not complied with the treaty and are still able to hold onto their nuclear weapons, showing one of the limits of IHL – it can only progress the world so far (Bouveret). With nothing binding or forcing the countries to ratify or comply with the treaty, it can't control countries that do not want to be controlled. Its main effect is to stigmatize the possession and usage of nuclear weapons, increasing the difficulty for other countries to get their hands on this destructive equipment. But still, organizations like the International Committee of the Red Cross still help enforce IHL and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

The International Committee of the Red Cross took the role of the "guardian" of IHL: its purpose being "to undertake the tasks incumbent upon it under the Geneva Conventions, to work for the faithful application of international humanitarian law applicable in armed conflicts and to take cognizance of any complaints based on alleged breaches of that law" [...], and also "to work for the



U.S. President John F. Kennedy signs the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, October 7, 1963.

understanding and dissemination of knowledge of international humanitarian law applicable in armed conflicts and to prepare any development thereof" (Sandoz). Its most important roles include "monitoring" IHL, being its "guardian angel," protecting it from new laws which may disregard what it stands for, and promoting the issue, to help spread information and educate people. The first function, monitoring, refers to the issue of keeping IHL relevant to current global issues and tensions. Essentially, this function is about improving flaws within IHL — constantly monitoring the law justifies the decision within politics to further adopt IHL and make more progress towards eliminating nuclear weapons in warfare. Secondly, the "guardian angel" function protects the law from any "weakening and damage" from other legislations that are

passed (Sandoz). It "safeguards" the progress that has already been made. An example of a situation where the gains of IHL could have been reduced is when the UN proposed the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel (Sandoz). This act assigned varying degrees responsibility of a conflict to those who made the underlying causes, and to those who conducted hostilities, usually soldiers. By enacting legislation that penalizes the soldier, even though they may not have wanted to have been deployed, it "discourages them from respecting international humanitarian law - what is the point, they may think, of behaving decently if you are classed as a criminal anyway?" (Sandoz). Lastly, the International Committee of the Red Cross helps disseminate information regarding these laws by reaching out to organizations to promote their campaign. By involving National Societies and making them "full members of the Movement," the International Committee of the Red Cross can expand and disseminate their information to new parts of the world, helping them create a "unique worldwide network made up of all National Societies" (www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/other/icrc_002_0963.pdf). Clearly, the International Committee of the Red Cross helps to protect IHL by constantly revising it, safeguarding its agenda from other legislatures, and by promoting it to new regions in the world through not only National Societies.

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The use of nuclear weapons in our past has caused irreversible destruction to not only the dynamics of families, but full cities as well. The impacts of the use of nuclear weapons ripple on for generations on end, whether it be through the detriments to people's physical health through radiation, the PTSD that stems from surviving an atomic bomb, or the PTSD that comes from the

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constant fear of being threatened by weapons that are made for mass killing. These weapons are far too dangerous to be left in the hands of countries during a period of such intense political tensions, like the Ukrainian and Russian war, or the Israel and Palestine conflict. However, IHL protects humanity from being destroyed by nuclear weapons, which is heavily monitored by the International Committee of the Red Cross. By understanding the agenda of IHL and what it stands for, people can gain a new sense of appreciation for all the underlying legislation and policies which keep humanity intact and help the cause by educating others on the dangers of nuclear weapons, as well as their potential for mass destruction.

1ST

ESSAY

1ST PLACE

LOWER HIGH SCHOOL

EXPLORATION OF THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW AND THE DEPLOYMENT OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

AMBERLY YU,

BASIS Chandler Charter School, Chandler, AZ

Amberly Yu

After more than seven decades since the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the ecological well-being and lives of the inhabitants in those regions remain in jeopardy. The international community has actively participated in extensive discussions concerning the significant destruction and appalling humanitarian repercussions caused by nuclear weapons. In recent times, there has been a growing focus on the risks associated with the use of nuclear weapons and their humanitarian consequences, particularly amidst unprecedented global transformations and frequent regional conflicts. This paper aims to present the primary principles of international humanitarian law relevant to nuclear weapons and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the latest international treaty addressing humanitarian concerns. Furthermore, it seeks to explore the application of humanitarian initiatives in the context of nuclear weapons usage.

1. Catastrophic consequences of nuclear weapons.

The severe repercussions of nuclear weapons arise from their unparalleled destructive capabilities. Due to their immense power, these weapons release intense shock waves, high temperatures in the form of thermal radiation, and substantial amounts of ionizing radiation upon detonation. Additionally, the explosion of nuclear weapons results in the creation of residual radioactive particles, commonly known as nuclear fallout, with a widespread dispersal range. Consequently, the detonation of nuclear weapons not only leads to a significant loss of life but also inflicts extensive and enduring damage to infrastructure and the ecological environment. Recognizing the hazards associated with nuclear weapons, there is a crucial international humanitarian imperative to diminish and prohibit their use, advocating for a world devoid of nuclear weapons.

2. Contribution to humanitarian initiatives

Contributions to humanitarian endeavors related to nuclear weapons involve apply-

The Memorial Cenotaph at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park.

ing specific rules from Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions, despite the absence of explicit regulations in customary international humanitarian law regarding their prohibition. Additionally, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty have, to some extent, restricted the development and spread of nuclear weapons. The entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in 2021 marks another crucial step towards a world without nuclear arms. The international humanitarian community, fully aware of the catastrophic consequences of nuclear weapon use, actively contributes by raising awareness, making appeals, and taking initiatives to inform people about the threat posed by nuclear weapons and condemn their use on a moral level to reduce and eventually eliminate their use.

3. Current dilemmas faced

Despite the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, the latest initiative addressing nuclear weapon use, coming into effect, it has yet to gain acceptance from nuclear-weapon States. Additionally, the pace of reducing nuclear forces has fallen significantly short of expectations. The treaty faces criticism for its lack of coercive force, inadequacy in enforceability and verification mechanisms, and, notably, the absence of sanctions—a significant issue. The potential realization of the treaty may even trigger a new arms race, contradicting the original goal of peacefully preventing war. Hence, numerous challenges persist in addressing the use of nuclear weapons within the framework of current international humanitarian law.

4. Direction of a breakthrough in response to the dilemma

To address the dilemma, there should be a gradual shift in the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) from aligning with existing nuclear non-proliferation treaties at the macro level to a comprehensive global ban. This transition should prioritize gradual nuclear disarmament and avoid hasty actions. Additionally, nuclear Powers need to take a more active role in fulfilling their international obligations to contribute to the achievement of a nuclear-free world. Improvements in the implementation and monitoring of the Treaty, along with the imposition of suitable sanctions on States parties violating it, are essential for ensuring the genuine realization of the Treaty.

From the Geneva Treaty to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, international humanitarian law has persistently addressed the challenges posed by nuclear weapons, prioritizing global security and peace. Despite numerous difficulties, it has significantly contributed to halting the spread of nuclear weapons through appeals and treaty formulations. We hope that, with the collaborative efforts of international humanitarian law and humanity worldwide, the inspiring vision of a world free from nuclear weapons will soon be achieved.

2ND

ESSAY

2ND PLACE

LOWER HIGH SCHOOL

BATTLING THE ATOM

IHL's Journey for Awareness

NIKHIL SINGARAJU,

Independence High School, Frisco, TX

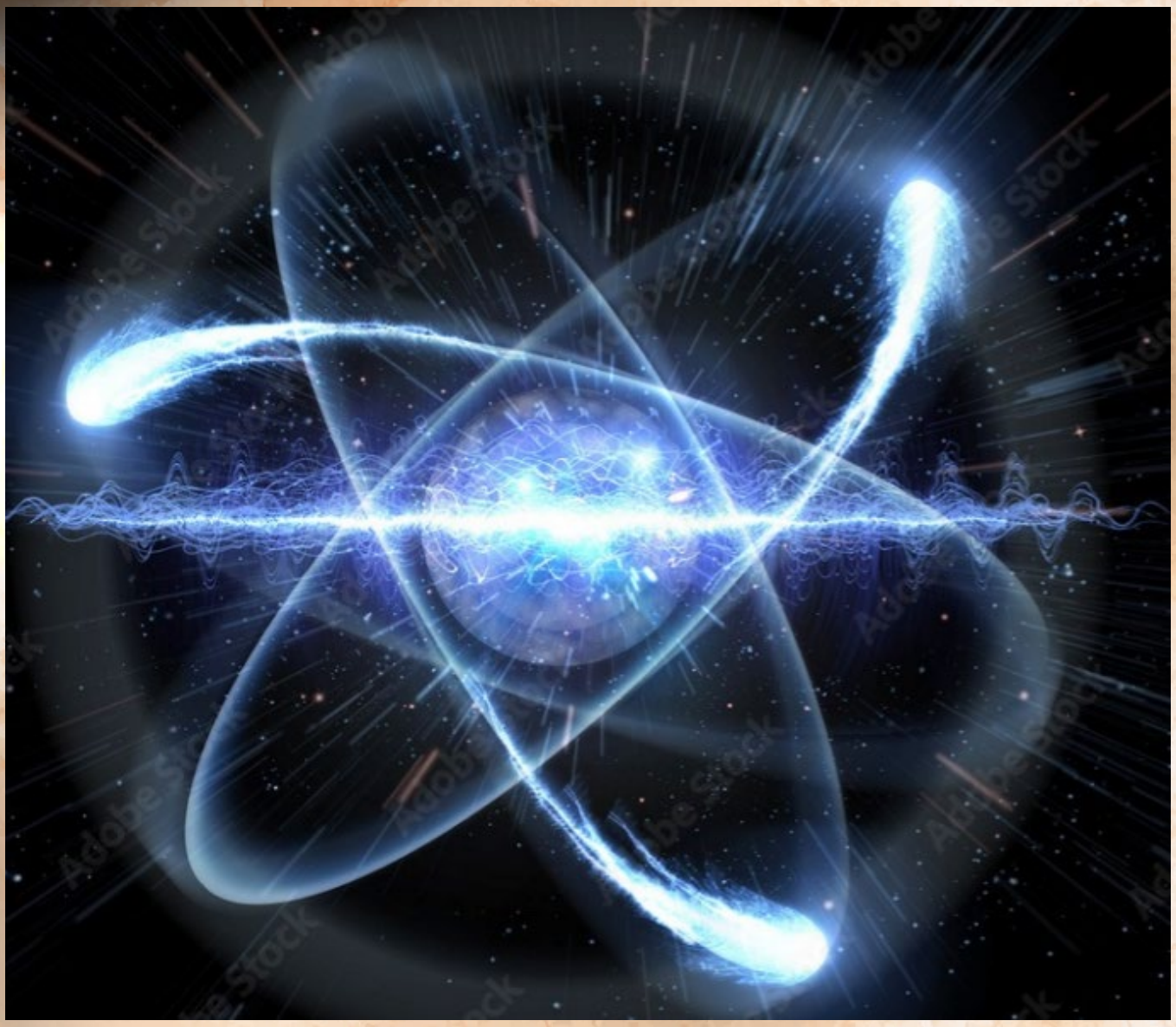
> THE WEAPONS OF WAR MUST BE ABOLISHED BEFORE THEY ABOLISH US"
>
> *- John F Kennedy (35th President of U.S.)*

August 1945 — The United States traversed the skies above Japan, leaving an unforgettable scar on the pages of history. On August 6 at 8:15 A.M., an atomic bomb codenamed "Little Boy", was dropped in Hiroshima, brutally killing 140,000 people in a city with a population of 350,000.

Fast forward to now, as of 2024, nine countries still possess nuclear weapons, one of those being the United States of America. These weapons, capable of causing unimaginable destruction, are a severe threat to global safety and well-being. Some weapons that are deadly enough to ruthlessly violate up to 700,000 people, representing an entire city such as Denver. One critical fact stands out, if nuclear weapons are used in any armed conflict, it can mean the end for an entire country, killing millions of innocent civilians.

Another danger lies in the testing of nuclear weapons, a hazardous problem that can expose radioactive material to individuals, further leading to severe health issues. Additionally, nuclear tests contribute to environmental degradation by contaminating air, water, and soil with radioactive particles, leaving Mother Earth a terrible place for current and future generations. To make this problem even worse, there are currently thirty-two ongoing armed conflicts, one of which is the Israel-Hamas War. This war has created a ruthless battlefield—the vibrant land and its innocent civilians are being killed. The Gaza Strip has transformed into an uninhabitable landscape, bombarded by missile attacks and gun massacres. The threat of nuclear weapons makes these situations even more dangerous in armed conflicts,

Amnesty International defines armed conflicts as the "devastating loss of civilian life" characterized by the "massive violation of international humanitarian law." However, this definition does not justly represent the magnitude and effects of armed conflicts, as they have become a staple of international politics. Throughout history, numerous global organizations focused on preventing, mitigating, and resolving these disputes. Despite the organizational efforts, armed conflicts persisted, killing many people and harming the environment. Then, International Humanitarian Law (IHL) emerged as an international warfare code, striving to protect the environment through strict provisions, influencing social media to take action on current affairs, and educating younger



generations about IHL to preserve a peaceful world. To truly understand the importance of International Humanitarian Law, the history and background must first be explored.

April 1859 — A deadly battle occurred in Italy where French and Austrian soldiers fought, resulting in a high number of casualties. Witnessing the suffering on the battlefield, Swiss businessman Henry Dunant interfered and attempted to aid the wounded. To prevent such catastrophes from occurring again, Dunant formed the Committee of Five, which eventually became the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

IHL has played a crucial role in shaping rules to limit these effects of armed conflicts. According to Rule 70 of IHL, "The use of means and methods of warfare which are of a nature to cause superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering is prohibited." (IHL Databases). This principle is established in numerous treaties to ensure that armed conflicts follow IHL standards and minimize the impact on civilians and the environment. Overall addressing the impacts of nuclear weapons on innocent people. In addition, IHL emphasizes the protection of civilians and the environment in the context of armed conflicts, particularly addressing the severe impacts of nuclear weapons. IHL sets forth comprehensive guidelines to regulate the conduct of parties involved in armed conflicts, aiming to prevent unnecessary harm and suffering. Furthermore, domestic courts are legally obligated to punish offenders who violate IHL. With these strict rules set, IHL heavily addresses the threats and dangers of nuclear weapons.

> THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA HAS BEEN A HUGE FACTOR, ALLOWING INDIVIDUALS WORLD-WIDE TO ACTIVELY PARTICIPATE IN PROTECTING OUR SURROUNDINGS.

Moreover, IHL's impact extends to social media, motivating people around the world to engage with current events. With nearly 1.3 million followers on all platforms, the International Committee of Red Cross greatly values social media and its networking proponents. By spreading information about IHL and nuclear weapons through social media platforms, ICRC volunteers and public citizens can quickly learn about humanitarian law. The Red Cross furthers IHL awareness through many other platforms as well, such as Youtube, Tiktok, and Instagram. ICRC ensures that both volunteers and the general public can quickly understand the principles of humanitarian law in the context of nuclear threats. According to the Cambridge Core, social media "[serves] as a useful conduit for monitoring armed conflict and tracking potential violations of IHL," including nuclear weapon threats. The Red Cross informs individuals about the status quo via social media, educating everyday citizens about the critical importance of IHL in preventing the catastrophic consequences of nuclear warfare. Overall, ensuring a well-informed global community that actively engages with the principles of IHL.

The role of social media enables organizations like the Red Cross to deliver mass information on international affairs quickly. The Red Cross doesn't just share information; they create conversations. Social media is a space where people can join discussions, ask questions, and learn from each other. It's a really effective way to spread awareness about IHL and the threat of nuclear weapons. In today's digital world, social media ensures that the principles of IHL reach people worldwide.

Besides IHL's principles, and its awareness on social media, IHL education also exists, aiming to spread the message of IHL. The American Red Cross Youth Action Campaign (YAC) serves as the paradigm for IHL awareness. Trained advocates spread information to other people through meetings, movies, and gatherings. The campaign, through its initiatives, empowers the youth to navigate armed conflicts responsibly, safeguarding themselves and the environment. According to the ICRC, it "[emphasizes] IHL teaching at leading [schools], to reach tomorrow's decision-makers and opinion leaders." By emphasizing IHL education into prominent educational institutions, the ICRC ensures that upcoming leaders are well-informed of IHL, protecting future generations. Another facet of IHL education is Exploring Humanitarian Law (EHL). EHL was created to teach young students "the basic rules of international humanitarian law" (ICRC). EHL provides young children with an introduction to International Humanitarian Law (IHL), teaching them the necessity of rules during armed conflicts. Not only this, but students are educated on the principles guiding rules in times of war, and topics such as nuclear weapons.The ICRC's dedicated efforts in promoting IHL truly informs individuals about nuclear weapons and its mass destruction.

Although nuclear threats exist, IHL has increased awareness and promoted nuclear weapons justice. And with its strict provisions, use of social media, and education tactics, IHL has created the foundation to keep humanity and nature safe. The influence of social media has been a huge factor, allowing individuals world-wide to actively participate in protecting our surroundings. IHL education, including programs such as the Youth Action Campaign (YAC), Exploring Humanitarian Law (EHL), and various other programs, have largely contributed to the awareness of nuclear weapons/threats. IHL will keep educating people what to do in tough times, teaching each and every individual on how to handle armed conflicts.

Ultimately, we lead back to the very beginning, to the wise words of John F. Kennedy: "We must get rid of weapons before they destroy us," but this time, there's something comforting, International Humanitarian Law.

ESSAY

1ST PLACE

JUNIOR HIGH CATEGORY

THE GRAVE THREAT OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

SHIREEN ARORA,

BASIS Chandler Charter School, Chandler, AZ

Shireen Arora

The end of the world could be closer than you think. Imagine waking up to a world where the cold is unbearable, where the sky is darkened by smoke, where the land is covered by ashes. Imagine living in a world where you have nothing to eat, nothing to drink, nothing to protect you. This could be our fate if we fail to stop nuclear weapons.

Nuclear weapons, also called atomic bombs or hydrogen bombs, are the ultimate weapons of mass destruction. They work by releasing huge amounts of energy from breaking or joining atoms. Nine countries have nuclear weapons today, but they have only been used in war twice. Nuclear weapons were created in a secret project during World War II, called the Manhattan Project. The first test, called Trinity, was a success, but it also led to the terrible bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. During the Cold War in the 1980s, the USSR and the USA had over 60,000 nuclear weapons between them.

These weapons can cause unimaginable damage and harm to people and the planet, both in the short and long term. One of the effects of nuclear weapons is blast, which is a shock wave that expands outward from the explosion at high speed, creating pressure that can destroy, crush, and throw objects and people. The blast can ruin buildings, bridges, roads, and other structures, as well as cause injuries such as burst eardrums, lung damage, and internal bleeding. The blast can also cause other effects, such as fires, landslides, earthquakes, and tsunamis. Another effect of nuclear weapons is thermal radiation, which is intense heat and light that comes from the fireball of the explosion. The thermal radiation can start fires, melt metal, and vaporize materials. It can also cause severe burns, blindness, and skin cancer. The thermal radiation can also create a firestorm, which is a huge fire that uses up oxygen and creates strong winds that can spread the fire and the smoke. Initial radiation, which is ionizing radiation that comes out during the first minute of the explosion, consists of gamma rays, neutrons, and other particles

that can go through the body and damage the cells, organs, and DNA. It can cause acute radiation sickness, which is a condition that includes symptoms such as nausea, vomitting, diarrhea, fever, hair loss, bleeding, and infections. It can also cause long-term effects, such as cancer, leukemia, and genetic mutations. Nuclear weapons also cause residual radiation, which is radiation that stays after the initial explosion, mainly from the radioactive fallout, which is the dust and debris that is polluted by the fission products and other radioactive materials. The fallout can be carried by the wind and the rain, and fall on the ground, water, and plants. It can also be eaten, breathed, or absorbed by the living things. It can cause chronic radiation sickness, which is a condition that includes symptoms such as anemia, fatigue, weakness, and organ failure. It can also cause long-term effects, such as cancer, leukemia, and genetic mutations. The effects of nuclear weapons are not only physical, but also humanitarian, environmental, social, and economic.

Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant following its 1986 disaster.

Nuclear weapons can cause human suffering, displacement, and death on a massive scale, as well as break human rights and international humanitarian law. Nuclear weapons can also harm the environment, change the climate, reduce biodiversity, and endanger food security. Nuclear weapons can also create social problems, such as psychological trauma, social unrest, civil conflict, and terrorism. Nuclear weapons can also have economic costs, such as loss of productivity, reconstruction, health care, and compensation.

Nuclear weapons are a grave threat to humanity and the planet, and must be prevented and eliminated. One of the ways to do so is to apply and enforce international humanitarian law (IHL), which is a set of rules that seeks to limit the effects of armed conflict and protect civilians and non-combatants. IHL does not specifically prohibit nuclear weapons, but it regulates their use in armed conflict by imposing general principles and rules that protect civilians and civilian areas, and limit the impact of weapons. For example, IHL requires the parties to the conflict to distinguish between civilians and combatants, and between civilian objects and military objectives, and to avoid or minimize harm to them. IHL also requires the parties to the conflict to respect and protect the natural environment, and to refrain from using weapons that cause unnecessary suffering, indiscriminate harm, or long-term environmental damage, such as nuclear weapons.

By applying and enforcing these principles and rules of IHL, nuclear warfare can be prevented or at least limited, as nuclear weapons would violate most of them. For instance, nuclear weapons cannot tell the difference between civilians and combatants, or between civilian objects and military objectives, and thus would breach the principle of distinction. Since nuclear weapons cause excessive and disproportionate harm to civilians and civilian objects, they breach the principle of proportionality. The rule on the protection of the natural environment is breached as nuclear weapons cause long-term environmental harm.

Another way to prevent nuclear warfare is to support and strengthen international treaties and regimes that aim to prevent the spread and use of nuclear weapons, such as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

> DUE TO THE INVOLVEMENT OF IHL, THE NUMBER OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS HAS DECREASED TO ABOUT 13,400, AS WELL AS THE REDUCTION OF NEW DEVELOPMENT, TESTING AND POSSESSION OF NUCLEAR GRADE MATERIAL.

(TPNW). These treaties and regimes are based on the principles and rules of IHL, and constitute an essential and long-awaited step towards a world free of nuclear weapons.

The NPT is a treaty that aims to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology, to promote cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, and to further the goal of achieving nuclear disarmament and general and complete disarmament. It entered into force in 1970, and has 191 states parties, including the five recognized nuclear-weapon states: the United States, Russia, China, France, and the United Kingdom. The NPT obliges the nuclear-weapon states to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race, nuclear disarmament, and general and complete disarmament. It also obliges the non-nuclear-weapon states to refrain from acquiring or manufacturing nuclear weapons, and to accept safeguards to verify their compliance.

The CTBT is a treaty that bans all nuclear explosions, for both civilian and military purposes, in all environments, aiming to constrain the development and qualitative improvement of nuclear weapons, and to prevent nuclear proliferation and nuclear terrorism. It also establishes a comprehensive verification regime, including a global network of monitoring stations and an on-site inspection mechanism, to ensure compliance.

The TPNW is a treaty that comprehensively prohibits nuclear weapons, prohibiting the development, testing, production, manufacture, acquisition, possession, stockpiling, transfer, use, and threat of use of nuclear weapons, as well as the assistance, encouragement, or inducement of anyone to engage in any of these activities. It also obliges the states parties to provide assistance to victims of the use and testing of nuclear weapons, and to take measures for the remediation of contaminated environments. The TPNW is the first treaty to explicitly recognize the humanitarian and environmental consequences of nuclear weapons, and to affirm the rights of victims and affected communities.

In conclusion, nuclear weapons are the most powerful and destructive weapons ever invented by humans, causing massive devastation and harm to people and the environment, both in the short and long term. Some of the main effects of nuclear weapons are blast, thermal radiation, initial radiation, residual radiation, and humanitarian, environmental, social, and economic impacts. These effects are not only physical, but also psychological, ethical, and legal. Therefore, it is imperative to prevent the proliferation and use of nuclear weapons, and to pursue nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. There are several international treaties and regimes that aim to prevent the spread and use of nuclear weapons, such as the NPT, the CTBT, and the TPNW. Due to the involvement of IHL, the number of nuclear weapons has decreased to about 13,400, as well as the reduction of new development, testing and possession of nuclear grade material. However, these treaties and regimes are not enough to ensure a world free of nuclear weapons, as they face challenges such as non-compliance, non-participation, and non-enforcement. Therefore, it is also important for people to take action at the individual and collective level to prevent nuclear warfare. One of the ways that people can do so is by educating themselves and others about the dangers and consequences of nuclear weapons, and by raising awareness and mobilizing public opinion through social media and other pla orms. By doing so, people can create a culture of peace and security, and pressure their governments and leaders to take concrete steps towards nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. By working together, we can achieve a safer and more peaceful world for ourselves and future generations.

2ND

ESSAY

2ND PLACE

LOWER HIGH SCHOOL

HAS IHL BEEN EFFECTIVE?

MADISON MIKITA,

Park Forest Middle School, State College, PA

Madison Mikita

On August 6th, 1945 a nuclear weapon was dropped on the city of Hiroshima. Three days later a second nuclear weapon was detonated above a suburb in Nagasaki. The impacts were terrible, killing hundreds of thousands of citizens. Since then international humanitarian law (IHL) has been advocating for the abolishment of nuclear weapons. The question is, have their efforts been successful? International humanitarian law has been effective because it indirectly prohibits nuclear weapons, inspired the Treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons, and protects people from armed conflict.

Because IHL indirectly prohibits nuclear weapons, it is considered effective. This can be shown by the quote, "States must never make civilians the object of attack and must consequently never use weapons that are incapable of distinguishing between civilian and military targets" ("Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons"). A nuclear weapon would therefore be considered unlawful under international law since nuclear weapons are incapable of distinguishing between military objectives and civilians (also known as an indiscriminate weapon). An indiscriminate weapon is defined as if "the weapon is capable of being targeted at a military objective and whether the effects of the weapon can be limited as required by international humanitarian law" ("Customary IHL - Rule 71. Weapons That Are by Nature Indiscriminate"). A nuclear weapon is one of the most indiscriminate weapons because they have uncontrollable consequences, cause extensive amounts of damage, and cause unnecessary civilian suffering. Because these weapons

> IHL HAS BEEN EFFECTIVE BECAUSE IT PROHIBITS INDISCRIMINATE WEAPONS, PUSHES THE MOVEMENT FORWARD, AND PROTECTS CITIZENS FROM ARMED CONFLICT.

are so destructive, IHL essentially bans nuclear weapons without actually banning nuclear weapons.

IHL has been effective because it inspired the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), which is a treaty that bans possessing, testing, producing, transferring, and use of nuclear weapons. According to the Council of Delegates of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, "is premised upon the principles and rules of IHL, as well as the principles of humanity and the dictates of public conscience." IHL was the first to take action against nuclear weapons and started the conversation. Now we are one step closer to a world without these weapons of mass destruction.

Because IHL protects citizens from nuclear threats, it is considered effective. According to the International Committee on the Red Cross

The peace symbol, designed by Gerald Holtom in 1958.

(ICRC), "IHL prohibits attacks that may be expected to cause excessive incidental civilian harm in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated." This means that IHL bans attacks that are expected to cause unnecessary civilian suffering, and we know that IHL has been successful in protecting citizens because the number of casualties due to armed conflict is decreasing. This is supported by the quote, "At least 10,000 civilians, including more than 560 children, have been killed and over 18,500 have been injured since Russia launched its full-scale armed attack against Ukraine on 24 February 2022" (United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine). Although civilian deaths are terrible no matter the amount, this is nowhere near the 38 million casualties from World War II. Therefore, IHL has successfully protected citizens from the brutality of armed conflict.

In conclusion, IHL has been effective because it prohibits indiscriminate weapons, pushes the movement forward, and protects citizens from armed conflict. Because of IHL, we have not had a nuclear weapon attack in 79 years. We owe our sense of security to the IHL and the other organizations that continued the conversation.

1ST

ART ENTRIES
1ST PLACE
UPPER HIGH SCHOOL

SUFFOCATING AIR

Thy Vu,
Fossil Ridge High School, Fort Worth, TX

Thy Vu

The artwork addresses the adverse effects of nuclear weapons on human health and the environment. The scene portrays a patient with severe burns, an instantaneous injury that can be caused by the weapon's blast or heat if within its radius. The aftermath of these explosions leaves broken infrastructure, displacing civilians who are unprotected from fallout, where high levels of radiation may linger for a few weeks or years. Exposure to radiation particles can cause radiation sickness and increase the risk of cancer in the long term. To represent this effect, the patient is breathing the radiated air, causing damage to their lower body. Nuclear fallout can also contaminate crops and plants, hinted through the wilting flowers. To convey the psychological trauma nuclear weapons inflict, I drew inspiration from art created by Hiroshima survivors to accurately depict their haunting experience: bodies scattered throughout the scene, tears streaking bloodied faces, and anguished cries as loved ones hold each other. These visceral images are weaved into the smoke left behind by the missiles; a homage to the victims of the nuclear tragedy. In highlighting these devastating consequences, I hope to emphasize the importance of IHL's establishment to prevent and reduce nuclear events.

2ND

ART ENTRIES

2ND PLACE

Upper High School

SORROWFUL SKULL

David Brannigan,

Wilkes-Barre Area High School, Plains, PA

David Brannigan

This year's theme is Nuclear Weapons and Armed Conflict, including the role of IHL in helping protect humanity from the devastating effects of these weapons. So, I wanted to represent how this threat may be harmful to our humanity, if not treated correctly. I expressed this by drawing a human skull holding a nuclear bomb in its mouth. The skull is shown wrapped in a few bandages as well as having a dove resting on its head. I wanted to convey the feeling of sorrowfulness in order for people to realize how to make a change for the better.

ART ENTRIES

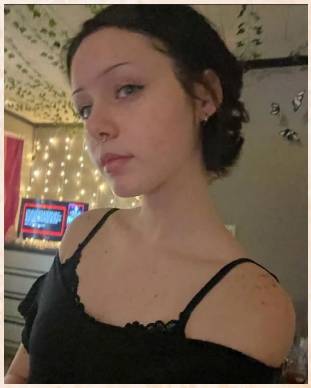
HONORABLE MENTION

Upper High School

UNTITLED

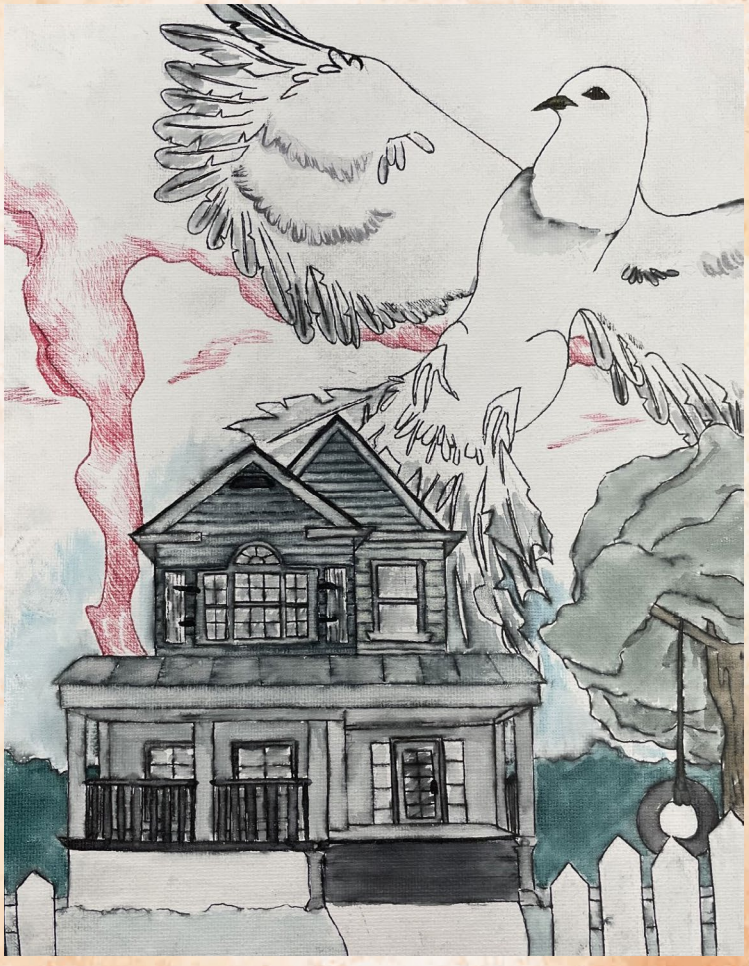
Paige Radjavitch,

Wilkes-Barre Area High School, Plains, PA



Paige Radjavitch

In the upper left corner, there is a red mushroom cloud. Mushroom clouds are commonly associated with nuclear weapons. Specifically, nuclear explosives. At the bottom, there is a suburban home. There is a tire swing in the front yard, which is tucked behind a picket fence. This part of my submission is intended to reflect humanity. Finally, there is a dove in the upper right corner. Doves are usually a symbol of peace, freedom, and gentleness.



ART ENTRIES

HONORABLE MENTION

Upper High School

WAR FOLLOWS YOU HOME

Molly Simko,
Wilkes-Barre Area High School, Plains, PA

Molly Simko

The impact of nuclear power and its possible fallout seems so dystopian that it makes it hard to imagine it could impact you in any way. But nuclear power can endanger anyone, anywhere, even in neighborhoods or cities like your own.

My piece shows a visual representation of a normal looking neighborhood that could be destroyed in the midst of armed conflict or a nuclear war.

1ST

ART ENTRIES
1ST PLACE
LOWER HIGH SCHOOL

HOPE FROM THE ASHES

ALINA CARNEY,
Kaiserslautern High School, Kaiserslautern, Germany

Alina Carney

This piece, titled *Hope from the Ashes,* represents both the horrors of nuclear war and the hope that IHL brings. Nuclear war has many devastating impacts, both instantaneous and long-term. I chose to display these horrific effects in the flames surrounding the missile. The various images show impacts such as the mass destruction of cities, death, separation from family and friends, and the development of leukemia, a serious cancer linked to radiation exposure. However, my art piece also displays the hope that stems from the mistakes of the past. Nuclear weapons' devastating and irreversible destruction inspired International Humanitarian Law and the hope that it brings. The petals of the flower showcase these laws and their impacts including humanity, proportionality, peace, healthy ecosystems, thriving cities, protection, and respect for life. Because of horrific nuclear events of the past such as the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, future generations can live in and continue to nurture a world built on peace, safety, and humanity.

2ND

ART ENTRIES
2ND PLACE
LOWER HIGH SCHOOL

SILENCE BEFORE THE IMPENDING CALAMITY

EVIE YANAITIS,
Wilkes-Barre Area High School, Plains, PA

Evie Yanaitis

My piece depicts a scene of a fictional city being stormed by aerial bombs, alongside marigold flowers living quietly in the foreground just before the tragedy hits. The nearest part of the work displays marigold flowers to symbolize the connection between life and death. Additionally showing how quickly it could be taken away from thousands of lives in a short amount of time. The far surrounding region displays a small peaceful village along with foliage and woodlands facing the distant city area and bay. The farthest scene depicts a crowded city made up of a light tower, churches, people, and their livelihoods; which are just about to be struck by the air raid.

ART ENTRIES

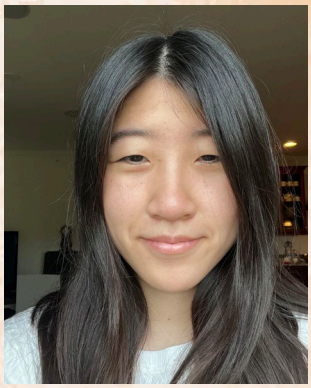
HONORABLE MENTION

Upper High School

THE BUTTERFLIES OF WAR

Carolyn Sohn,

Council Rock North High School, Newtown, PA



Carolyn Sohn

In honor of this year's topic "Nuclear Weapons and Armed Conflict," my painting depicts a metaphorical illustration of the devastation war inflicts upon innocent civilians. While researching for specific examples of armed conflicts, I found too many instances of cruelty affecting countries and families, and for me, the saddest details were the photos of children surrounded by smoking buildings and rubble looking for help. I was most inspired by the Ukrainian war, but also wanted to represent other armed conflicts around the world which is why the bleak interior takes on a melted shape of the Ukraine.

While the margins of the painting showcase a calm and vibrant landscape of nature and flowers, the hand torn cardboard center is an emerging scene of shadows and smoke which symbolizes the overwhelming destruction in various armed conflicts around the world. The Butterflies of War represent the most fragile of those affected, trying to escape, but helplessly trapped, with few able to cross the border to a safe sanctuary. This sad reality emphasizes the need to help and alleviate the physical injuries and emotional distress forced upon families and children.

ART ENTRIES

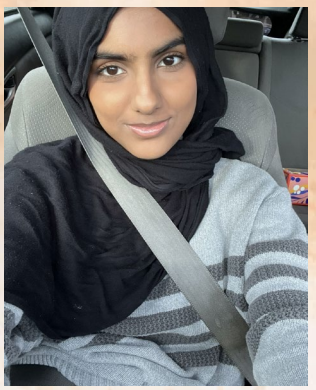
HONORABLE MENTION

Upper High School

ARE THERE NO INNOCENTS IN WAR?

Sarina Rizvi,

Ocean View High School, Huntington Beach, CA



Sarina Rizvi

My art piece represents the cruel reality for children in war. Delving into the theme of armed conflict and nuclear weapons, my art shows a poignant exploration of the devastating reality faced by innocent children ensnared in the tumult of war. At its core, the piece features the heart-wrenching image of a lifeless child's hand resting on the ground, tightly clutching a toy—a powerful symbol encapsulating the brutality of armed conflict against innocent civilians. This visual narrative seeks to illuminate the harsh toll exacted on the most vulnerable members of society. Over 10,000 kids in Gaza, over 500 kids in Ukraine, and over 1,200 kids in Sudan have succumbed to the tragedies of war. However, the child clinging onto the toy represents a sense of hope. The intention behind this is to show that peace is an option and we can stop the tragic ending faced by many, specifically through cooperation with IHL. My artwork advocates for a world where every child can grow up devoid of the haunting specter of war, emphasizing the imperative for recognizing and applying IHL in all armed conflicts.

GET INVOLVED WITH IHL

If I were to speak of war it would not be to show you the glory of conquering armies but the mischief and misery they leave in their tracks

-Clara Barton

The American Red Cross proudly carries out the mission of educating the American public about International Humanitarian Law (IHL), a responsibility that stems from the Geneva Conventions and our Congressional Charter. This completely free program is led by more than 2,500 youth and adult volunteers, who help educate their communities about the importance of IHL in helping reduce suffering during times of armed conflict. Since 2020, Red Cross IHL volunteers have educated more than 250,000 Americans about IHL. The enduring legacy of IHL and its power to reduce the destructive effects of war hinges on broad public understanding and appreciation of these laws. You can make a difference in your community by joining our IHL mission!

The IHL Youth Action Campaign (YAC) is a free American Red Cross program that encourages youth and young adults (ages 13 to 24) to learn about the laws governing armed conflict and empowers them to promote understanding and appreciation for IHL in their community. Interested youth will become official American Red Cross volunteers and form and register YAC teams with as few as two students. These youth volunteers, known as YAC Advocates, receive free training on IHL fundamentals, including the laws specific to the annual YAC theme. Past themes have included education during armed conflict, protection of the environment, and protection of cultural property. After finishing their training YAC Advocate teams design their own outreach campaigns, which can include social media efforts, classroom seminars, hosting guest speakers, holding student contests, and more. YAC Advocates are encouraged to get creative in how they connect with their communities, while enjoying the support and guidance of fellow Red Cross staff and volunteers.

If you are interesting in promoting IHL in your community as part of the IHL Youth Action Campaign, contact your local chapter or send an email to IHLyouth@redcross.org.

American Red Cross | Youth Action Campaign