

The following are Professor Richard Clapp's remarks at GBPSR & IPPNW's 2024 Global Health and Peace Awards:

I'd like to thank the organizers of this event for honoring me, along with Elaine Scarry, with one of the Global Health and Peace Awards. I deeply appreciate this honor. I don't know exactly what the organizers considered, but let me briefly say a couple things that come to mind. First, in the early 1990s, I co-authored a chapter in the book called "Nuclear Wastelands: A Global Guide to Nuclear Weapons Production and Its Health and Environmental Effects." This was published by MIT Press in 1995, after a five-year process led by staff at IPPNW and a sister organization called the Institute for Energy and Environmental Research. I had been part of an earlier epidemiologic feasibility study to identify populations exposed to ionizing radiation in order to better characterize the shape of the cancer dose-response curve at low dose. That study included evaluating populations exposed throughout the nuclear fuel cycle, including uranium mining, milling, uranium enrichment and plutonium production, nuclear weapons assembly and disassembly, weapons testing, etc. We considered both worker exposure and exposure to surrounding communities. We assessed the literature published at the time, visited selected sites where health effects research had already been done or was still underway.

At the time of the writing of the IPPNW book, I had also visited one of the world's largest uranium mines in Namibia in southern Africa. The worker exposures at the mine and community exposures where African workers and their families lived, were excessive. This was included in the book, as well. Furthermore, information about nuclear weapons production in other countries such as Russia, France, the UK and more, was incorporated into the IPPNW book. The editors concluded that the global health and environmental consequences of nuclear weapons production were massive and would be on-going for decades and even centuries to come. It was a privilege for me to join with IPPNW in bringing this story to light.

A second topic that the planning committee for this event may have considered is my work documenting the public health consequences of global climate change. I first got engaged in this topic through my dear friend Dr. Paul Epstein. Paul and Dr. Eric Chivian had attended the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development meeting as representatives of Physicians for Social Responsibility. The UNCED meeting, sometimes referred to as the "Earth Summit," included many scientists concerned about environmental degradation but had very few physicians or health scientists focusing on human health impacts or the connections between global warming and health. In the following years, Paul and I taught a course together at Boston University School of Public Health in which we presented this topic, and Paul and Eric developed a full course at Harvard Medical School to introduce the topic in more depth into medical education at Harvard and many other medical schools throughout the country.

I subsequently included climate change and health into another BU course called "Great Calamities and Their Consequences for Public Health," and I began speaking at public meetings, and testifying in favor of Massachusetts legislation and Boston City Council ordinances aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing renewal energy production. I have continued this work in my retirement in Portland Maine. Speaking of Maine, I should add that I grew up in the same hometown as Dr. Bernard Lown, one of the founders of both PSR and IPPNW. Dr. Lown attended Lewiston High School, in Lewiston Maine, and went on to an illustrious career, as I'm sure you are all aware. Earlier this year, I had the opportunity to attend the unveiling of a portrait of Dr. Lown in Lewiston, done by a Maine artist who has done a series that highlights "Americans Who Tell the Truth." While I am not in the same league as Dr. Lown, I have tried to live my life as another example of an American who tells the truth.

Thank you again for honoring me. I've done some other things, too, but that's enough for me to say this evening.