

**The following are Professor Elaine Scarry's remarks at GBPSR & IPPNW's 2024 Global Health and Peace Awards:**

It's an honor to stand here with these beautiful string quartets still in the air. Perhaps if all the violins, cellos, and violas in the world would play one note at high noon, it would bring down the nuclear arsenal and bring down the Earth's temperature as well. In the meantime the loveliness of this music enables us to imagine, at least for twenty minutes, a world that has fine arrangements, a world that might one day deserve to be called beautiful.

Thank you, Michael Christ, for your generous words. I can mirror them back to you because it is the Physicians for Social Responsibility and the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War that inspire so many of us here tonight. To picture Physicians for Social Responsibility first emerging here in Boston, then prompting the formation of International Physicians which in turn, with other groups, assisted the coming into being of the International Campaign for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons, which again in turn and climactically contributed to the writing and ratification of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons – is to picture a progression steadily unfolding in scale while becoming dazzlingly concrete in outcome. Back from the Brink, though still very young, has 21 towns just in Massachusetts alone and 43 members in the House of Representatives. It may across time undergo the same kind of expansion coupled with sudden crystallization into a decisive outcome. –especially when people like Anna Linakis, Molly McGinty, Joe Hodgkin and Michael Christ are involved.

The ancient Greek poet Sappho says, I do not hope to touch the sky // with these two hands. But in the very act of denying her reach, Sappho accomplishes it in this lovely poem. It isn't for most of us even an option to keep our hands down at our sides. Many people in the world today have given up, they shrug off nuclear abolition as crazed in the scale of its ambition. Perhaps the world's worst cruelties always seem out of reach, yet later generations always look back and scorn such populations for their stark immorality. Gandhi says, "You can wake a man who is asleep; but you can't wake a man whose pretending to be asleep." Many today are pretending to be asleep.

Tonight, Michael credited my ability to bring together intellectual scholarship and practical activism (and if I have successfully synthesized these two, it is with the help of my life partner Philip Fisher and my brother, Joe Scarry) . But this coupling, too, is an attribute of

Greater Boston and International Physicians – for they couple one of the most bracing forms of intellectual work, medicine, with the immediacy of activism: only injuries that have not yet happened can be undone.

My work over fifty years has proceeded along two avenues, one the path of beauty and creation, the other the path of willfully inflicted injury.

My earliest book is called *The Body in Pain: the Making and Unmaking of the World*. It focuses on torture and war. It shows the way the difficulty of expressing physical pain produces deeply unjust political consequences; it enables the torturer to appropriate the totalizing power of pain to make his failing regime look powerful. The concrete instances came from many countries, but not the United States; following 9/11, however, I had occasion to write a series of articles for the *Boston Review* on our country's obscene acts of transgressing international law through torture, illegal assassination, violation of the white flag, and violation of the red cross -- articles later gathered together in a book called *Rule of Law, Misrule of Man*. Meanwhile my study of war in *The Body in Pain* had made visible the fact that nuclear war more closely conforms to the template of torture than the template of war, since it affords zero consent and zero capacity for self defense: like the prisoner in torture, the populations of earth are tied to their chairs unable to lift their hands to protect themselves or offer mutual aid. These forfeited rights are elaborated in a book called *Who Defended the Country? And another book called Thinking in an Emergency*.

I have spent three decades continuing to work on nuclear war and the way the arrangements for presidential first use and sole authority, violate our own Constitution, thereby dismantling democracy, replacing it with a thermonuclear monarchy, as the title of that book announces. But if we run the script in the opposite direction what we find is a way to abolish our nuclear architecture. Its apex event –presidential sole authority and first use – is also its Achilles heel because it is deeply illegal and if United States courts can be persuaded it is unconstitutional, that ruling will deal a large blow and vastly increase the pressure on the country to comply with the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. International law and Constitutional law can attack this lethal architecture from two sides. The unconstitutionality of presidential sole authority and first use, is like a small slingshot in the hand of David taking on Goliath.

We all share these concerns, and I am deeply grateful to Greater Boston Physicians for Social Responsibility and International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War for letting me, for tonight, be the one to represent what is all of our shared concern.