

The following are Maria Udalova's remarks at GBPSR & IPPNW's 2024 Global Health and Peace Awards:

Thank you all so much for this incredible honor. I am deeply grateful to be recognized for my efforts in the movement for nuclear abolition, alongside so many dedicated individuals who are tirelessly working for the same cause.

I want to take a moment to acknowledge the youth I've had the privilege of working alongside, particularly the members of Students for Nuclear Disarmament (SND). Through the efforts of our SND team, we've mobilized youth to demonstrate that young people truly can make a difference. Time and time again, I am astounded by what my colleagues continue to achieve.

Personally, since joining this remarkable organization last February, I've had the opportunity to lead fellow students in their activism journeys, connect with other passionate individuals, and participate in disarmament and peace events from coast to coast. I was in Seattle over the summer and was able to work with other student activists to bring SND to Washington State and spread our message to other peace and disarmament organizations. "These are experiences I don't think I would have been able to achieve without the encouragement of my colleagues at SND, so thank you.

I'd also like to thank the mentors who have supported me in this journey. Your wisdom, encouragement, and guidance have made my advocacy possible. And a heartfelt thank you to my parents for heroically moving from Florida to here so I could have opportunities like this, and for letting me skip school to go lobby.

This recognition means so much more than just an award to me; it represents the growing importance of youth voices in shaping a safer, more peaceful world. I want to emphasize how crucial it is that young people, like myself, are given these moments of recognition, and I'm not just saying that because I like to hang plaques on my wall. When people our age are acknowledged for our work, it shows us that we're not just participants in the conversation — we're leaders. It proves that our voices matter and that we have the power to make real, lasting change. For many young people, especially those who are unsure if they can make a difference or if they should start their own activism journey, seeing their peers recognized can be the spark that inspires them to take action.

This is why your support for youth activism is invaluable. When you invest in young voices, you empower us to drive meaningful change in our communities. So please, continue to uplift and mentor young activists, because by doing so, you are cultivating the next generation of leaders who will shape a brighter, more peaceful future.

This award is bigger than Talia and I; it's about the shared strength, determination, and potential of young people everywhere who refuse to accept a future defined by the specter of nuclear weapons.

So thank you once again for this award and for recognizing the critical role of youth in shaping a nuclear-free future.