

1982

PHYSICIANS FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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Dear Friend:

Such statements by policy makers and their advisors indicate that the unthinkable nuclear war is rapidly becoming thinkable in Washington. Too many now talk in a matter-of-fact way about the use of nuclear weapons.

Do these policy makers understand the consequences of the policies they propose?

In a full-scale nuclear war with the Soviet Union as many as 140,000,000 Americans would die. More destructive power than in all of World War II would be unleashed every second for the brief hours it would take for the missiles to fall.

And more people would be killed in the first few hours than in all the wars of history put together. These would be the prompt casualties--those who escaped the blast would die more slowly from radiation exposure, disease and starvation.

As physicians who have studied the medical consequences of nuclear war we know there are no victors--only the dead and the dying.

In March 1980, more than 700 leading physicians, in an action organized by the Physicians for Social Responsibility, signed an open letter to President Carter and Chairman Brezhnev on the medical effects of a nuclear holocaust. As the Reagan administration is now committed to the biggest arms buildup in our history, we are compelled to renew this warning based on medical and scientific analysis.

1. Nuclear war, even a "limited" one, would result in death, injury, and disease on a scale that has no precedent in the history of human existence.
2. Medical, "disaster planning" for nuclear war is meaningless. There is no possible effective medical response. Most hospitals would be destroyed, most medical personnel dead or injured, most supplies unavailable. Most "survivors" would die.
3. There is no effective civil defense. The blast, thermal and radiation effects would kill even those in shelters, and the fallout would reach those who had been evacuated.
4. Recovery from nuclear war would be impossible. The economic, ecologic and social fabric on which human life depends would be destroyed in the U.S., the U.S.S.R., and much of the rest of the world.
5. In sum, there can be no winners in a nuclear war. Worldwide fallout would contaminate much of the globe for generations and atmospheric effects would severely damage all living things.

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