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PHYSICIANS FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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Dear Friend:

The majority of Americans expect an all-out nuclear war within the next ten years, according to a recent Newsweek poll. Our policymakers in Washington have abandoned a policy aimed at deterring nuclear war. Instead they seek to increase our nuclear arsenal in the vain pursuit of winning a nuclear war with the Soviet Union. This senseless optimism is based on the hollow premise that the American people, in any meaningful sense, can survive the ultimate holocaust.

For example, in the new Five-Year Defense Plan, Secretary of Defense Weinberger states that U.S. forces must be capable of "controlled nuclear counterattacks over a protracted period..." in order to "prevail and be able to force the Soviet Union to seek earliest termination of hostilities on terms favorable to the United States."

Eugene Rostow, until recently Director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, sees recovery from nuclear war as a manageable problem. He has said: "Japan after all, not only survived but flourished after a nuclear attack...Depending on certain assumptions, some estimates predict 10 million (dead) on one side and 100 million on the other. But that is not the whole population."

The Federal Emergency Management Agency, which oversees our civil defense program, concurs with Rostow and asserts that Americans "could overcome all the challenges of the post-attack environment." And T. K. Jones, Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Strategic and Theater Nuclear Forces, is convinced that "Everybody's going to make it if there are enough shovels to go around...Dig a hole, cover it with a couple of doors and then throw three feet of dirt on top. It's the dirt that does it."

How does one respond to such madness? Do these policymakers understand the consequences of the policies they propose? We think not.

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 each second during 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 immediate casualties. Those who escaped the blast would die more slowly from radiation exposure, disease, and starvation.

This is not our government's illusion of victory or survival. It is the bleak, unchanging reality. As physicians who have studied the medical consequences of nuclear war, we know there would be no victors--only the dead and the dying.

Because the Reagan Administration is now committed to the biggest arms buildup in our history, we of Physicians for Social Responsibility are compelled to issue this grim 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. As the enclosure details, there is no possible effective medical response. Most hospitals would be