



# Baltic Bike Tour

## Medical Students Cycling against Nuclear Weapons

### Summary:

This summer, International Medical Students for Peace cycle around the Baltic Sea in an effort to attract public attention to the dangers of nuclear weapons, bring across their message that nuclear weapons are bad for people's health and support the movement for a Nuclear Free Europe.

### Rational:

In 1990, the Iron Curtain fell and the Cold War which had brought the world to the brink of Mutual Assured Destruction by nuclear weapons came to an end. Today, we live in a world where failed development, AIDS, natural catastrophes and terrorism pose the gravest threats to our well being. Still, countries like Russia, the US, France, the UK and China hold on to their nuclear arsenals and quicker than expected, other countries joined this nuclear club, increasing the danger of nuclear weapons being used again. More than 60 years after the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, nuclear weapons are still around, threatening the livelihood of people around the world.

Today, nuclear arsenals are still set on hair-trigger alert in the US, Russia and Europe, aiming at each other's capitals and endangering the health of the general public. Incomprehensible as it may seem, the world is still in danger of being destroyed by an accidental launch of Russian or American missiles. The region around the Baltic Sea, where former Warsaw Pact and NATO countries faced off during the Cold War is still cruised by nuclear submarines and countries like Germany are still harbouring US nuclear weapons for a possible attack by Russia. Chemical and biological weapons were banned, very recently a similar grass roots movement managed to push through an international ban on landmines. Why not nuclear weapons? The US stockpiles of nuclear weapons will not help protect it from terrorist attacks or aid in its struggle to pacify the Gulf region. Instead, billions of dollars are spent each year for the maintenance of over 10,000 nuclear warheads. The absurd situation we live in today, with a peaceful and united Europe on the one hand and the continued nuclear stand off on the other is not acceptable.

After the failed Review Conference of the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty last May, it seems to many that only a public outcry can accomplish what diplomats have failed to: de-alerting the existing 20,000 nuclear warheads and beginning the eventual abolition of these unnecessary and dangerous weapons of mass destruction. With terrorists threatening to employ fissile material in an attack on western targets, the looming danger of hackers actually being able to trigger a nuclear launch and Russian nukes as vulnerable to theft as never before, the words of Muhammad el Baradei, the head of the IAEA, sound more and more realistic: "Never before has the danger of nuclear weapons being used been as high as today." Adding to that the threat posed by a nuclear arms race on the Indian subcontinent, the Korean peninsula and in the Middle East, we as the young generation of health professionals have an obligation to raise awareness of this growing threat for world health.

As conscientious medical students from all over the world we refuse to accept this irrational status quo and this grave threat to global health and human survival. We, the young generation of doctors, decision makers and inhabitants of this planet have to take a close look at the nuclear inheritance we are about to receive. In medicine, when there is no cure or treatment for a disease, we opt for a strategy of prevention. That is what we need to strive for. The proper therapy for this threat cannot be to protect oneself from nuclear attack, but to abolish these weapons once and for all.

For this reason, the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW), which received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1985 for its work against nuclear arms will hold a large meeting of medical students and physicians from all over the world in Helsinki this September, where they will discuss ways towards the abolition of nuclear weapons and a possible campaign for a Nuclear Weapons Convention, effectively banning these inhumane weapons of mass destruction. In order to raise public attention over this topic, a group of medical students from all over the world will tour the countries around the Baltic Sea with their bicycles, starting off in Estonia's capital Tallinn, passing through St. Petersburg and ending their two week tour in Helsinki. Along the way, they will hold public rallies, explain the threat of nuclear weapons to the local population, meet with media representatives and decision makers like members of the NGO "Mayors of Peace" and make a strong case for the creation of a Nuclear Free Zone in Europe.

## Methods

One form of informing the public will be installations of the international student project "Target X". In this project, medical students take to the streets with their message and place a large red "X" on the central square of a city, informing the passing public about the potential effect a nuclear bomb would have on their town. Explaining the radius of destruction modern nuclear weapons have, the long-term impact of radiation and the unimaginably high costs of manufacturing, transporting and storing these weapons and the effects this has on other aspects of society like education, culture and health, the medical students try to make people understand that nuclear weapons are unhealthy for society even without being used at all. These interactive teach-ins have already been undertaken in places like New York or Boston in the US, St. Petersburg in Russia, Berlin and Rostock in Germany, Patna in India, Vancouver in Canada and Melbourne in Australia and have shown to be effective tools for mobilizing the population in the global campaign against nuclear arms.

Also, meetings with representatives of local NGO's, student organizations, medical faculties and members of the global movement of Mayors for Peace will attempt to establish a network of anti-nuclear activists across the region, which will be further supported by the programmatic work of the IPPNW World Congress.

## Itinerary

The total route will encompass roughly 880 km and pass through three countries on the Baltic coast. The tour will commence in the Estonian capital of Tallinn on August 20<sup>th</sup>, 2006 and we will travel along Estonia's northern coast line for the first 4 days, arriving at Narva on the Russian border on the 24<sup>th</sup> of August. From Narva, the tour will enter Russia and head towards St. Petersburg, taking three days to reach the city of the czars. After spending some time in St. Petersburg holding public demonstrations and meeting with decision makers and students, the bikers will continue on the old "King's Road" for the rest of the way, passing by the Russian city of Vyborg after three days and reaching the Finnish border on the fourth. After four more days through Finland, where frequent stops will also see public installations of Target X, the tour will reach Helsinki on September 5<sup>th</sup>, one day ahead of the IPPNW World Congress.



## Funding

This tour will largely be self-funded by the bikers and their national IPPNW affiliates. Individual donations as well as a grant from the International Student Fund of IPPNW will ensure that the tour can take place as planned.

## Contacts

In order to find out more about this tour, its route or the activities along the way, please contact the tour organizers at [balticbike@web.de](mailto:balticbike@web.de) or take a look at our website [www.ippnw-students.org/baltic](http://www.ippnw-students.org/baltic)