

CNWC Award Presentation, Ottawa, September 26, 2019

By Douglas Roche

We are gathered here tonight to honour two distinguished peace education activists, Dr. Mary-Wynnne Ashford and Dr. Jonathan Down, for their exemplary and inspiring teaching on the medical and humanitarian consequences of nuclear war.

The term “peace education” embraces a wide field of subjects that make up the common security agenda. “Disarmament education” is a special area concentrating on the reduction and elimination of armaments — the instruments that killed 100 million people in the 20th century and go on threatening every person on the planet today. The most horrendous of these instruments of death are, of course, nuclear weapons.

When the first United Nations Special Session on Disarmament was held in 1978, the final document created a disarmament education initiative to explain to the largest possible number of people that, in the nuclear age, security is not found in an ever-expanding accumulation of arms, but in the development of international cooperation. Disarmament information programs were launched around the world and, in 1980, UNESCO held a World Congress on Disarmament Education. The University for Peace in Costa Rica was founded. Fellowship and research programs were started. The development of the themes for a culture of peace, to replace the culture of war, followed. The Government of Canada joined other governments in helping to finance the growing number of civil society disarmament education programs.

The two decades that followed the first Special Session on Disarmament were an exciting time. I felt energized throughout this period. The world was, coherently, moving forward, and the structural architecture for nuclear disarmament was beginning to take shape. Disarmament education raised the level of public engagement.

Then — something happened. Call it the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Call it the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Call it the sweeping powers of the military-industrial complex. An array of forces led to a loss of public focus on needed disarmament efforts. Our youth today are not being taught the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of the use of even one of the 14,000 nuclear weapons possessed by nine countries. There is a gigantic dis-connect between the gravity of the nuclear weapons crisis and governmental inaction. More public knowledge is needed about nuclear disarmament steps that are being taken, such as the new Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Disarmament education must be revived. Enter the two visionary doctors.

Mary-Wynne Ashford and Jonathan Down have grasped the magnitude of this problem and turned their formidable teaching skills into action. The two doctors, who reside in Victoria, B.C., formed a team in 2017 to give joint presentations to inform and energize students in classrooms on Vancouver Island, encouraging them to become involved in nuclear disarmament activities. I have talked to teachers who hail their work.

Their teamwork approach is innovative and productive, and worthy of being emulated throughout Canada, and that is why Canadians for a Nuclear Weapons Convention is proud to give them our annual Achievement Award. As Ernie Regehr, the CNWC Chairman, has stated: “We are giving this award to recognize

them and also encourage similar programs across Canada to help young people understand the gravity of the nuclear weapons problem and how they can participate in nuclear disarmament groups.”

Dr. Ashford is a retired family physician and former Co-President of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, which won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1985. She was a high school chemistry and English teacher before studying medicine. Her book, *Enough Blood Shed: 101 Solutions to Violence, Terror, and War*, has been translated into Japanese and Korean.

Dr. Down is a developmental paediatrician, a Clinical Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of British Columbia. He is the incoming President of Physicians for Global Survival and a charter member of the Vancouver Island Peace and Disarmament Network.

It is a pleasure to present the CNWC 2019 award to the Vancouver Island dynamic duo.

