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WORLD MEDICAL ASSOCIATION STATEMENT

ON

WEAPONS AND THEIR RELATION TO LIFE AND HEALTH

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PREAMBLE

The World Medical Association (WMA) recognises that when nations enter into warfare or into

The World Medical Association (WMA) recognises that when nations enter into warfare or into weapons development, they do so for strategic reasons which are usually short term. They do not consider the immediate or long term effects of the use of weapons on the health of individual non-combatants within their population and on the public health as a whole, either in the short or in the longer term.

Nevertheless the medical profession is required to deal with both the immediate and long term effects of warfare, and in particular with the effects of the use of different forms of weapons.

DEFINITION

In considering the role of physicians in the control of weapons-related injuries, suffering and deaths, the WMA recognises that the effect of weapon use can be viewed as a public health issue.

No weapon is medically acceptable to physicians, but physicians can aid in making effective controls against weapons which cause injury or suffering so extreme as to invoke the terms of International Humanitarian Law.

The potential for scientific and medical knowledge to contribute to the development of new weapons systems, targeted against specific individuals, specific populations or against body systems, is considerable. This could include the development of weapons designed to target anatomical or physiological systems, including vision, or which use knowledge of human genetic similarities and differences to target weapons. Physicians involved in research into the effects of such weapons systems, whether as agents for weapons development companies or for control agencies, will face extraordinary ethical challenges as their work could be used by those who pay no regard to international law or accepted standards.

Although the effects of weapon use on non-combatant individuals and on groups or societies is identifiable there are no current and commonly used criteria to measure weapons effects. International Humanitarian Law states that weapons which cause injuries which would constitute "unnecessary suffering or superfluous injury" are illegal. These terms are not defined and require interpretation against objective criteria for the law to be effective.

Such criteria would aid lawyers in the use of International Humanitarian Law, allow assessment of the legality of new weapons currently in development against an agreed, objective system of assessment of their medical effects; and would identify those which would breach the Law if developed.

Physician involvement in the delineation of such objective criteria is essential if it is to become part of the legal process. However, it should be recognised that physicians are opposed to any use of weapons against human beings.

RECOMMENDATION:

The WMA believes that the development, manufacture and sale of weapons for use against human beings is abhorrent. To support the prevention and reduction of weapons injuries the WMA:

- (1) supports international efforts, involving the International Committee of the Red Cross and others, to define objective criteria which would measure the effects of current and future weapons, and which could be used to stop the development, manufacture, sale and use of weapons;
- (2) recognises that modern medicine depends upon the continuous development of technology and insists that this technology must not be abused or diverted into weapons development;
- (3) calls on national medical associations to urge national governments to cooperate with the collection of such data as are necessary for establishing objective criteria;
- (4) calls on national medical associations to support and encourage research into the global public health effects of weapons use, and to publicise the results of that research both nationally and internationally to ensure that both the public and governments are aware of the long term health consequences of weapons use on non-combatant individuals and populations.

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