

Statement

Neighbours as friends, not enemies

Nordic-Russian seminar, PRIO, Oslo, 3.- 4. February 2020

A Nordic-Russian civil society seminar was organized in Oslo 3. - 4. February 2020 by the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Norway, and the Norwegian Peace Association. The theme of the seminar was "Neighbours as friends, not enemies". The seminar, which gathered some 45 participants from Denmark, Finland, Norway, Russia and Sweden was a follow up to a Nordic peace and dialogue trip to Russia in May 2018. The seminar was held at the Norwegian Peace Institute Oslo, PRIO, and was funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The organisers are already planning a follow up seminar in Norway in 2021.

The main intention with the seminar was to strengthen relations between peace activists in the North, discuss common challenges and visions and contribute to mutual understanding and perhaps even help reduce the present tension. The tension between the West and Russia is one of the drivers behind the present militarization and arms' race, involving both conventional and nuclear weapons.

Participants had open discussions on how to promote peace, disarmament and a sound environment, and agreed to seek ways to continue with practical and strategic forward-looking initiatives and solution-oriented dialogues. Many echoed the words of the Mayor of the border city of Kirkenes that our security lies in the strengthening of people to people cooperation across borders.

The use of enemy images and the demonization of leaders both in mainstream political discourse and media is dangerous as it installs fear and also is meant to influence peoples acceptance of rising military budgets.

Participants agreed that we should not accept that the world's resources, natural, financial and intellectual, are being misused for military purposes, and that we need to prove that this thinking is dangerous, naive and obsolete. The military actually makes us less safe, both economically and ecologically, by taking so much of the resources that are needed for other purposes and by the enormous greenhouse gas emissions, the radiation and pollution it provides. We cannot allow the military to be an exception to international climate agreements. Instead we must move the money to be able to tackle the real security issues such as the threat to the very survival of humanity and the planet, be it by climate change, environmental degradation, excessive inequality or nuclear weapons.

Different alternatives were discussed of how we can contribute to changing attitudes in order to reverse the nuclear and space-arms race, reduce defence spending and get us out of the dominant growth oriented, militarized, confrontational and competitive patterns. In short, how can we build common security, human security, a culture of peace, and non-violence.

Among the concrete suggestions were to:

- . continue the sharing of knowledge and ideas,

- . get inspiration from each other's culture and art,
- . work for the strengthening of civil society and democratic practices,
- . seek ways of producing and consuming which ensures the well being of all and the integrity of the biosphere.
- . establish permanent structures for peace, such as ministries and departments for peace to promote peace at all levels,
- . cherish and use the UN, diplomacy and multilateral cooperation,
- . help implement the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement on climate,
- . strive for a non militarized and nuclear free Arctic and Baltic Sea basin,
- . maintain the Arctic Council non-militarized and operational,
- . gather individual signatures and cities in support of the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons,
- . continue to warn against nuclear and other hazardous waste and make waste management safer,
- . seek closer cooperation between the peace movement and environmental organizations,
- . actively learn to work across generations and share knowledge and priorities,
- . cross borders and seek new partnerships with "sister" groups and organisations.

Finally, it was considered most vital to build trust between peoples, so essential for real cooperation, and for our survival.