



PEACE BUREAU QUESTIONS CHOICE OF OBAMA FOR NOBEL PEACE PRIZE

Geneva, 9 October 2009. The International Peace Bureau today expressed concern at the announcement of the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize since it fails to respect the intentions expressed by Alfred Nobel in his will. Nobel wrote that the Peace Prize is to go to whoever "shall have done the most or the best work for fraternity between nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing armies and for the holding and promotion of peace congresses".

While congratulating the U.S. President on this highest of global awards -- notably for having restored hope to millions concerned about the state of the planet -- the organisation raised numerous questions about the choice. "The Norwegian Nobel Committee shows very little respect for the intentions behind the Prize, says Tomas Magnusson, IPB President. "Nobel was explicit in his intention to support people and initiatives in need of the prize money to advance their peace work."

Obama's achievements are so far very mixed. Despite his positive steps to pull US troops out of Iraq and close Guantanamo, Obama committed himself even before he was elected President to increasing the US military presence in Afghanistan, and just a few days ago refused to consider withdrawal. US drones are still bombing villages in North-West Pakistan in the hope of eliminating Al Qaeda militants. Eight years on from 9-11, the world's military superpower remains – together with its NATO allies – bogged down in a bloody and controversial conflict.

Furthermore, the first military budget passed under Obama's administration is the largest in history – \$534 billion (plus billions more for ongoing war operations). This can scarcely be considered a contribution to 'the reduction in standing armies' stipulated in Nobel's will.

It is of course true that the arrival of the new team at the White House has transformed the prevailing mood in international relations and put an end to the unilateralism of the Bush years. Obama's Prague speech, the subsequent negotiations with the Russians and the abandonment of the Missile Defence plans for Eastern Europe have invigorated efforts towards nuclear disarmament. His efforts to reach out to Muslim nations and communities are helping soften some of the sharp antagonisms between the Islamic world and the West.

However we have seen little real progress in the past year in resolving the Iranian and North Korean nuclear crises; the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is still desperately stuck; and Obama has not yet overcome opposition in his own country to even elementary disarmament measures such as the Comprehensive Test Ban or the very necessary radical steps on climate change. Naturally, IPB shares the hope of the Nobel Committee that the Prize will strengthen him in his efforts.

On balance it is perhaps too early for this particular Nobel Peace Prize. “Obama will no doubt make a brilliant Nobel speech”, commented Tomas Magnusson. “But it would have been wiser to wait for some more concrete results before greeting him as one of Nobel’s ‘champions of peace’. Meanwhile there are hundreds of outstanding individuals and peace organisations all over the world for whom the award of the Nobel Peace Prize would have massively boosted their reputation and prospects. For them this is an opportunity lost.”

The International Peace Bureau is dedicated to the vision of a World Without War. We are a Nobel Peace Laureate (1910), and over the years 13 of our officers have been recipients of the Nobel Peace Prize. Our 300 member organisations in 70 countries, and individual members, form a global network which brings together expertise and campaigning experience in a common cause. Our main programme centres on *Sustainable Disarmament for Sustainable Development*. We welcome your participation.

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