

Nobel Peace Prize 2024

It goes to qualified recipient for first time in at least six years

by David Swanson, World BEYOND War*

Congratulations are in order for "Nihon Hidankyo", the Japan "Confederation of A- and H-Bomb Sufferers Organizations". The Nobel Peace Prize has for the first time in at least six years gone to a group of people who work to reduce warmaking, people who in fact seek to abolish nuclear weapons. Nihon Hidankyo has relentlessly done the work of educating the world, thanklessly, for many years. This prize should be celebrated far and wide.

Congratulations are also in order to the *Nobel Committee*, for somehow maintaining the prestige of the Nobel Peace Prize despite how the committee has mistreated it time and time again, and for – this time – getting it right. May this mark a new principled commitment!

And congratulations may also be deserved by the *Nobel Peace Prize Watch*,¹ which has worked for many years to influence the Nobel Committee to begin complying with the requirements of the will of Alfred Nobel, and to the group's leader, the late *Fredrik S. Heffermehl*, whose books on the topic of the Nobel Peace Prize – including on who *should have been awarded*² it 123 different years – have been outstandingly educational and inspiring.

In recent years, nuclear weapons have been the one strong point for the Nobel Committee, the one area of overlap between what they have treated as the purpose of the prize and the actual original purpose of the prize. In 2017, the prize was awarded to the *International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons*.

This year's award is being given to *Nihon Hidankyo* "for its efforts to achieve a world free of



10/24/11, Hiroshima. Toshiyuki Mimaki, (r.) President of "Nihon Hidankyo" (A- and H-bomb victims' umbrella organisation) speaks to the media about being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. (Moe Sasaki/Kyodo News via AP)

nuclear weapons and for demonstrating through witness testimony that nuclear weapons must never be used again."

It's unfortunate that the Nobel Peace Prize website, just below the announcement, puts in big, bold font: "Did you know no nuclear weapon has been used in war in nearly 80 years?" In an important sense, this is true, but in two important senses it is only true because the words "in war" are included. One is the horrific, deadly, and land-stealing testing that has been done. The other is the one stressed by the late *Daniel Ellsberg*: a gun used in a bank robbery without being fired has nonetheless been used.

Possessors of nuclear weapons have threatened to use them many times. The nuclear weapons industry is also used to pressure governments to support nuclear energy. Nuclear weapons are also used to transfer massive resources out of human and environmental needs into the insane construction of instruments of

* *World BEYOND War* is a nonprofit organization with offices around the world working to end all wars and establish lasting peace through education, activism, and media.

WBW was founded on 1 January 2014, when co-founders *David Hartsough* and *David Swanson*, together with a group of like-minded peace activists, wanted to

launch a global movement to abolish the institution of war itself, not just the 'war of the day'. If war is ever to be abolished, they decided, it must be removed as a viable option. Just as there is no such thing as 'good' or necessary slavery, there is no such thing as 'good' or necessary war. Both institutions are abhorrent and unacceptable under any circumstances.

terricide. Nuclear weapons manufacturers are even used to teach children the acceptability and nobility of warmaking.

The Nobel Committee once gave the prize to U.S. President *Barack Obama* who, after delivering the only pro-war Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech ever, went to Hiroshima and *told everyone there*,³ including the survivors of the nuclear bombs, that nuclear weapons would not be eliminated in his lifetime. He then proceeded to peddle familiar *pro-war myths*.⁴ Now the Nobel Committee has given the prize to a group that demands the immediate elimination of nuclear weapons, fully aware that people in this lifetime have the exact same genes and tendencies as people in any other more responsible, decent, and wise lifetime.

Last year, I confess I almost gave up hope. The Nobel Committee awarded a *peace prize*⁵ that violated the will of Alfred Nobel and the purpose for which the prize had been created, selecting a recipient who blatantly was not *"the person who has done the most or best to advance fellowship among nations, the abolition or reduction of standing armies, and the establishment and promotion of peace congresses."*⁶

There is no question that advocating for human rights is a good thing, or that doing so under an oppressive government is a courageous thing, or that doing so without hypocritically using violence is a wise thing. But the Nobel Peace Prize was created to support war abolition, not a random selection of good issue advocacy.

And the practice of selectively awarding the prize to victims of the governments targeted by the U.S. military supports, rather than reduces, militarism. Of the most oppressive governments on Earth, there are only a few not armed, trained, and supplied by the U.S. military, and only one with which the U.S. government has recently torn up an agreement that stalled the drive toward war in Washington. The recipient of last year's (2023) prize, *Narges Mohammadi*, like her colleague and previous recipient *Shirin Ebadi*, opposed both abuses by the Iranian government and sanctions and threats of war from the U.S. government. But the awarding of the prize did not serve peace, and only strengthened senseless global division. Everyone knows that no Western political journalist prisoner, such as Julian Assange, would ever be given such a prize.

In 2022, with its eyes on the news of the day, there was no question that the Committee

would find some way to focus on Ukraine. But it steered clear of anyone seeking to reduce the risk of the at-the-time relatively minor war escalating or creating a nuclear apocalypse. It avoided anyone opposing both sides of the war, or anyone advocating for a ceasefire or negotiations or disarmament. It did not even make the choice one might have expected of picking an opponent of Russian warmaking in Russia and an opponent of Ukrainian warmaking in Ukraine.

Instead, the Nobel Committee chose advocates for human rights and democracy in Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine. But the group in Ukraine was recognized for having "engaged in efforts to identify and document Russian war crimes against the Ukrainian civilian population," with no mention of war as a crime or of the possibility that the Ukrainian side of the war was committing atrocities. The Nobel Committee may have learned from Amnesty International's experience of being widely denounced for documenting war crimes by the Ukrainian side.

In 2021 the prize went to advocates for human rights in Russia and in the Philippines. In 2020 the prize went to the *World Food Programme*. In 2019 the prize went to the President of Ethiopia and claimed some relationship to peace as he had been part of a peace agreement. But he was a president and commander of a military and not in any need of funding or support. He had engaged in all sorts of violence and human rights abuses, so that an advocate for human rights in his country could be given the prize if the U.S. government's relationship to that country changes.

The 2018 prize did not go after war itself but did go after sexual violence in wars. Not bad, relatively speaking. The 2013 prize went after chemical weapons. But stretching back through the years, we see a common practice of most often awarding a peace prize to either actual war-makers or to advocates for good causes that are not peace, as well as the practice of using the prize for Western political purposes that are hostile to peace. Although virtually every topic can be tangentially connected to war and peace, the avoidance of actual peace activism intentionally misses the point of the prize's creation by Alfred Nobel and the influence of *Bertha von Suttner*.⁷

The Nobel Peace Prize has largely devolved into a prize for random good things that don't offend a culture dedicated to endless war. It has been awarded for journalism, for working

against hunger, for protecting children's rights or women's rights, for teaching about climate change, and for opposing poverty. These are all good causes and can all be connected to war and peace. But these causes should go find their own prizes.

The Nobel Peace Prize is so devoted to awarding powerful officials and avoiding peace activism that it is often awarded to the wagers of wars, including *Abiy Ahmed*, *Juan Manuel Santos*, the *European Union*, and Barack Obama, among others. At times the prize has gone to opponents of some aspect of war, advancing the idea of reforming even while maintaining the institution of war. These awards have come closest to the purpose for which the prize was created, and include the 2017, 2018, and 2024 prizes.

The prize has also been used to advance the propaganda of some of the world's major war makers. Awards like that of 2023 have been used to denounce violations of human rights in non-Western nations targeted in the weapons-funding propaganda of Western nations. This record allows Western media outlets each year to speculate before the prize announcement on whether it will go to favorite propaganda topics, such as *Alexei Navalny*. The awarding of the prize has done nothing in recent years to diminish warmaking, and has perhaps done the opposite, with prizes going to opponents of the Russian government prior to escalations of the war in Ukraine. One can only hope that the 2023 prize does not encourage a war on Iran.

In 2021, at a moment when the world's largest weapons dealer, most frequent launcher of wars, dominant deployer of troops to foreign bases, greatest enemy of the *International Criminal Court* and the rule of law in international affairs, and supporter of oppressive governments – the U.S. government – was trumpeting a division between so-called democracies and non-

democracies, the Nobel Committee chose to throw gas on the fire, declaring:

"Since its start-up in 1993, Novaja Gazeta has published critical articles on subjects ranging from corruption, police violence, unlawful arrests, electoral fraud and 'troll factories' to the use of Russian military forces both within and outside Russia. Novaja Gazeta's opponents have responded with harassment, threats, violence, and murder."

Also given the prize that year was a journalist from the Philippines already funded by CNN and by the U.S. government, in fact by a U.S. government agency often involved in funding military coups.

That there are always numerous candidates who plausibly meet the criteria of Alfred Nobel's will each year and could have been appropriately awarded a Nobel Peace Prize has been established by the list of nominees published each year by *Nobel Peace Prize Watch*,⁸ and by the *War Abolisher Awards*. "World BEYOND War" has created the *War Abolisher Awards* to fill the gap left by the Nobel Committee's frequent abandonment of the cause of ending war.

Source: <https://worldbeyondwar.org/nobel-peace-prize-goes-to-qualified-recipient-for-first-time-in-at-least-six-years/>

¹ <https://nobelwill.org/>

² <https://davidswanson.org/who-should-have-won-the-past-123-nobel-peace-prizes/>

³ <https://davidswanson.org/obama-in-hiroshima-paints-a-peace-sign-on-a-bomb/>

⁴ <https://worldbeyondwar.org/myths/>

⁵ <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2023/summary/>

⁶ <https://www.nobelprize.org/alfred-nobel/full-text-of-alfred-nobels-will-2/>

⁷ <https://davidswanson.org/what-we-owe-to-bertha-von-suttner/>

⁸ <http://nobelwill.org>