

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

June 2, 2009 at 9:18am

Nobel laureates to come to Los Alamos

by John Dear

On the Road to Peace

We've been at the task earnestly for the last six years. Each August to mark Hiroshima Day, Pax Christi New Mexico and friends gather at Los Alamos, birthplace of the bomb and every succeeding generation of nuclear weapons, to pray, vigil and repent as best we can for the mortal sin of war and nuclear weapons.

In recent years, we have adopted the method of the people of Nineveh and donned the accoutrements of sorrow and regret: sackcloth and ashes. And like the Ninevites, we beg God for the gift of peace, for nuclear disarmament. *Save us, O God, from ourselves!*

This year two Nobel Peace Prize winners -- Jody Williams of Vermont and Mairead Maguire of Belfast -- will join us. Indeed, they asked to come. Jody won the 1997 Nobel for her work to ban landmines around the world. The International Campaign to Ban Landmines was the fruit of her work. It began in 1992 with a staff of one and over the years mushroomed into a network of 1,300 affiliates in 95 countries.

She served as chief strategist and spokesperson for the ban land mines campaign during the Sept. 1997 diplomatic conference in Oslo where an unprecedented cooperative effort between government leaders, U.N. officials and the International Red Cross led to the signing of an international treaty banning antipersonnel landmines. In 2006, she co-founded the Nobel Women's Initiative, comprised of women Nobel laureates serving women around the world in their struggle for justice. She organizes, agitates and teaches.

At bottom her message is simple: each one of us can make a difference and change the world. All we have to do is join the struggle and do what we can for disarmament and justice.

Joining us, too, will be Mairead Corrigan Maguire, a clarion voice for Gospel nonviolence. She was awarded the Nobel peace prize in 1976 after suffering a series of losses to rend the heart. Her niece and

two nephews were lost to the vortex of violence during Northern Ireland's Troubles.

But she responded with neither vengeance nor despair. Rather she entered the breach with a proffer of peace. She organized massive peace rallies, much to the astonishment of the (male) warring factions. And later she founded the Peace People Community and dedicated her life to promoting creative nonviolence. In 1997, while living in Derry, Northern Ireland, I gathered her best speeches and essays together into a beautiful book, *The Vision of Peace*. She remains one of my teachers.

Mairead has traveled to the bloodiest corners of the globe: Iraq, Israel, Palestine, Bosnia, Rwanda, Burundi, and Burma. And at every stop she appeals to human conscience -- put an end to war, adopt the ways of nonviolence.

Peacemakers, however, often provoke ambivalence; it's in the nature of things. Here and there they welcome Mairead with joy. But she finds she's not welcome everywhere. Just last week, Homeland Security detained her at Houston's George Bush Intercontinental Airport.

She was on her way back to Belfast, having just spoken with other Nobel laureates at a women's conference in Guatemala. But during the layover, authorities detained her and whisked her off to a side room, took her fingerprints and a mug shot and sat her down for two hours of interrogation. A culture that can't discern between nonviolence and terrorism is in grave danger. The blindness, if not downright stupidity, of such officials is telling. She was only released because of pressure from the Nobel Women's Initiative.

Unintimidated, she responded to the press:

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I stand in solidarity with many human rights defenders, who stand for the dignity and rights of everyone to life, freedom and human and civil liberties. I have traveled to the U.S. many times in the past 30 years to share the message of peace and reconciliation. I have also undertaken my world citizenship responsibility to join with the American peace movement in protesting U.S. foreign policies which are causing much suffering in the world. I have always been inspired by the American peace movement and consider it an honor to be able to support them in their work for a peaceful world.

Mairead keeps Nobel laureates from resting on their laurels. On May 17, she prevailed on seventeen of them to sign a letter called "the Hiroshima-Nagasaki Declaration." Released in Hiroshima, it calls upon world leaders, and all people, to eliminate nuclear weapons. And it warns that unless humanity fails in that endeavor, "the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki" will be repeated.

Such weapons, she says, belong to the tragic past. They belong to a time when the world lacked the wisdom to realize that each culture needs the other to survive. Governments which still hold such weapons violate the prohibition of war in the U.N. charter. But more than that, she says, they're operating anachronistically. They're out of touch with the insights of the times. Nowadays our enemies aren't across the border. The enemies of humanity today are poverty, environmental destruction, militarism, and war. Our security nowadays lies in nonviolence and love. She insists that we all need to heed the wisdom of nonviolence and apply it institutionally, internationally, globally.

Mairead and Jody are determined to do what they can for the abolition of nuclear weapons, especially in

this pivotal year as treaty renewals, threats, and proliferation are back in the news. And so our Pax Christi group has rented the Santa Fe Convention Center for the evening of July 31 to hear these great women speak to us about the task at hand, before we all journey up the mountain to Los Alamos the next day.

Ours is a modest gesture, but we're doing what we can to raise consciousness and keep the movement moving. We invite everyone to join us, to reignite the spirit of nonviolence within, to lift high the vision of a nuclear-free world. Wherever you are, plan now to remember Hiroshima and Nagasaki this August, and organize locally to put new pressure on the U.S. government to abolish its nuclear arsenal and turn those boundless resources to meet the staggering needs of suffering humanity and our endangered planet. If you can, join us on July 31 and August 1. (For more, see www.paxchristinewmexico.org)

As Mairead concluded in *The Vision of Peace*, "Everyone of us has a role to play in the creation of a new culture of nonviolence."

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John Dear will lead a weekend workshop on the Sermon on the Mount at Loyola Univ. in Chicago on June 26-27. To register, contact, www.asrenewal.org, or email, aluther@luc.edu. Next week, he will be the keynote speaker at the annual Dallas Peace Dinner. St. Anthony Messenger's Press has just published *John Dear On Peace*, by Patricia Normile. John's two new books are *A Persistent Peace* (Loyola Press) and *Put Down Your Sword*, (Eerdmans). For information on his books and speaking schedule, see: www.johndear.org.

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