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Interview with Victor Chelashow

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Summary:

Victor Chelashow, a Kenyan physician and former IPPNW student representative, integrates public health with nuclear disarmament advocacy. He emphasizes the intersectionality of nuclear issues with climate change and social justice, tailoring messages to resonate with African audiences. Chelashow critiques the underrepresentation of Global South voices in nuclear debates and calls for inclusive language and platforms. His work focuses on education and universalizing the TPNW as steps toward stigmatizing and eventually eliminating nuclear weapons. This document summary was generated by an artificial intelligence language model and was reviewed by a Wilson Center staff member.

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Robin Möser: Okay, great. This is Robin Möser talking to Victor Chelashow. I hope I pronounced your name correctly?

Victor Chelashow: That's correct. Yeah.

Robin Möser: And let me introduce you, briefly. You served until this month as the international student representative for the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, the IPPNW. And you were advocacy co-lead at Youth for TPNW, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. And generally speaking, I think I can say you are actively involved in advocating for the TPNW in Kenya, Eastern Africa, in the whole of Africa. And I also read you participated in the Nuclear Ban Week in Vienna two years ago, as well as in a bike ride from Nairobi to Mombasa and I would be keen to hear more about this. So yes, let's start off finding out more about yourself and how you personally got involved in the topic, your interest, and actually about your background and the organisational work you do.

Victor Chelashow: Thank you, brilliant. So, like you've heard, my name is Victor, I come from a small town called Eldoret in Kenya. This is where I was born and raised. And I was lucky enough to go into medical school. And it was actually during my years in medical school that I started becoming active not just with the nuclear disarmament, but as well as small arms and light weapons. So, in medical school, we used to have sort of a club where other than studying, we used to have fun activities we'd go on walks, we'd go on bike tours, biking together, not exactly a tour, but just biking around the city and listening to music or even playing music together. And it was through such engagements that I learned about a small group called Medical Students for Social Responsibility, which pretty much the name states everything. So, we used to gather, and then maybe together go visit children's home, or even just collect rubbish around the hospital, around schools, sometimes do public education, public awareness. And it was close to 2017. Because we usually have elections in Kenya every five years. The first election we would have when I was a young person in medical school was in 2017, and 10 years prior to that in 2007, we had very bloody clashes. Lots of people losing their lives. People were tortured, raped, you name it. All sorts of war crimes were committed. And we were very cautious that it will happen again. And so we had to take preventative measures. And so we started doing a lot of peace work. So suddenly, all our projects started because of peace work. And then there was a position that came up in the group to be project coordinator. And I quickly took it because I was active. And so we did a lot of peace projects, but then it was more towards small arms and light weapons. And then later, we went to the northern part of Kenya, there's a refugee camp, one of the largest in the world called Kakuma. And then we also carried the message there, medical peacework. Now, the message shifted, it was not just talking about violence prevention, because these people had already gone through horrific things in their lives. And so they were recovering from violence. So we went to the message of peace and health, but also trying to infuse the message of healing at the same time. And so when we were traveling, that's fine, but I think someone casually mentioned it, we were just chit chatting about recording about experiences. And then it occurred to us suddenly, that unlike small arms and light weapons, where we actually have people after who have encountered them or have had damage done to their lives or to their bodies by small arms and light weapons, the same case cannot apply with nuclear weapons. There is no meaningful response. So, that's when it clicked that "Oh God, if it ever happens, we would not have survivors, we would not have people to talk to about healing you would be gone, gone". So, I think that is when it sort of ticked off in my mind. I started taking this nuclear weapon advocacy, anti-weapon global advocacy, a little bit more seriously. And

then I connected to the larger group that is IPPNW. I should have said that the medical social facilities responsibility is just a local chapter, but it's an affiliate of a IPPNW when you look at it globally. So, that's how I took interest and started pursuing anti-nuclear weapons advocacy.

Robin Möser: So, let me clarify this, please: The Medical Students for Social Responsibility are part of the IPPNW?

Victor Chelashow: Indeed, in this case a local affiliate. But we focused more on small arms and light weapons and their effects, because we don't have nuclear weapons here. So, it just makes more sense.

Robin Möser: I totally understand. In 2007, elections in Kenya and the civil war like conditions, there were no nukes involved, of course, luckily, but small arms and light weapons.

Victor Chelashow: Yes. So, moving forward, I started getting more aware and involved with international student organizations and movements within IPPNW, but I didn't take any active roles until it was in 2021, immediately after the pandemic. We had elections for international student representative, I was very lucky to serve in that capacity. Alongside with another colleague of mine from Nigeria called Dominic Yusuf and lady from India, her name is Ulfat Pardesi. And so together, we started to come up with more ideas of how we can bring the message, not just to medical students, but to young people at large. And I took the interest more, because I felt like all through... I mean, I don't take it for granted that I had a group of physicians to hold my hand to guide me through research publication to form perspectives when it comes to nuclear weapons that are very essential. But I also needed to learn from other people, from other countries or other professions, how they view this issue and how they approach it in their everyday lives. And most importantly, how they advocate against it.

Robin Möser: So would they be activists, researchers and academics?

Victor Chelashow: Yeah, I would get all that through Youth for TPNW, because we went beyond medical students, then suddenly I had people from communications, from policy, international relations, and they had very interesting perspectives towards disarmament and how they act to follow the disarmament discourse. So, out of interest, I took a position in advocacy. We started out really, really small. When I joined there were only like four people. We didn't even have working groups. We had barely nothing, no accounts, no nothing, we started out from scratch. I took interest in advocacy and I also roped in one of the central office staff from IPPNW, she works in Boston, she lives in Boston, Massachusetts, her name is Molly McGinty. And so together we were advocacy colleagues. And then we used to conceptualize, and then to actualize advocacy actions, not just in the big conferences, but also during, you know, regular days like this. So, in Kenya, we would get to Nairobi and we would go outside the parliament, we had posters with placards or sometimes we would have bikes ride along in our city here in Eldoret. And the whole point is to try to raise awareness. Because when you talk to people about nuclear weapons here, they're like, "Ah, that's a White Man's problem". "We don't have those, tell me something else." So, we sort of had to do a lot of public education. And most importantly, we had to tie it sort of to discover an intersectionality between things that matter to people and nuclear weapons. And for us, one of the most devastating essential threats that we face right now is climate change, here in Africa. So, once we figured out how to connect climate change and nuclear weapons, then it became significantly easier. And now, we had to get out the message to people, the message of nuclear weapons and climate change and how together they work in concert. And, you know, causing external effects to people like us, who have never even thought of having a

nuclear weapon. But still, we could face any relation with all of that. So, we also sort of rebranded the messages and trying to get it out in a way that people would understand and help them feel the impact that he would have in their lives. So that was, I think, pretty much I would summarize my advocacy as that whole process. But, of course, there's the other stuff with the social media and so many other things, but I think this was this was the substance of where I put a lot of my efforts. And then other than that, of course, I had my work within IPPNW, which included advocacy, we used to have periodic meetings, we did research, and we really hope it's gonna get published soon about artificial intelligence and existential threats. And we discussed how artificial intelligence could interfere with, you know, nuclear weapons systems and other things. And I really hope it's gonna get published. So, there's also a lot of work to do around research, around publication and also, of course, to help people who are researching,

Robin Möser: Did you do this with IPPNW colleagues and you would focus each on some aspects, and then you put it together collaboratively?

Victor Chelashow: Yeah, IPPNW, I met a colleague. His name is Devin, who is a PhD student, MD PhD student in the United States. And he tries to focus more on the neuropsychiatric impacts. That's what he's doing, because his interest is in psychiatry, I came from a medical peace work perspective. But then we had the both to share the sort of overseeing everything, doing all the reading, proofreading editing the manuscript. So, it was pretty much collaborative work, but from different angles. Also notes that Ruth actually had published, they published a paper last year in 2023, the Federspiel paper, if you've seen it. I think I'll forward it to you. So, we also collaborated with her experience and expertise in that in that area. So, yeah, that's where we are.

Robin Möser: Okay. Thank you for this. And this begs the question why did you stop working for the IPPNW in mid-2023?

Victor Chelashow: Yeah, 2023. So, my turn as international student representative came to an end. And it was so nice that it came to an end in Mombasa, where we had the first congress in Africa. We organized everything. To help people from my panel, the visitors, and then the correspondence to also give other people opportunities to help to push their careers ahead through the work of disarmament. I still am involved in various capacities, but mostly I'm transitioning into research. And I think also as a junior doctor, which I should have maybe mentioned, it's kind of tricky right now. With the situation where between work and advocacy, especially as a junior. I think maybe as a mid-career doctor. Yeah, you get significantly more time, but we are the first on call, so all the work falls on us.

Robin Möser: Okay, but you still keep yourself involved?

Victor Chelashow: I'm still involved. I'm still involved. In IPPNW we have working groups. So, I contribute more through the climate change and nuclear weapons working group. So, this is where a lot of action is taking place and where my energy is directed.

Robin Möser: And how do you view the role of nuclear weapons today in the world and what kind of impact do you think they have? Is it rather a stabilizing factor? What is your perspective on nuclear weapons and you may expand on the nuclear weapons-climate change nexus?

Victor Chelashow: Yeah, interesting. So, I think, as a colored person, actually nuclear weapons have no role in our world today. Today and also the future. There's no role of nuclear weapons. I think they are

a total waste of time, resources and energy. And I'll tell you why. So, first of all, I'm going to start with the process of developing a nuclear weapon all the way up to the top, maybe it's detonated or disintegrated. So, we can start with, you know, mining uranium. Starting here in East Africa. We have a country called Democratic Republic of Congo, where most of the uranium comes from, also they get this from Mali. Still, these are one of the most impoverished African countries, unfortunately. And the uranium mining is not done in any ethical fashion at all. You have people mining with their bare hands, you have people going into the pits, where there's uranium to get them out, hold them with their hands and then you know, the goal submitted or wait and then they get that daily wages, which of course is very meagre to get people into poverty. So, already from the onset, from the start, we have people of color, you know, facing already repercussions for things that they're not going to use. And then when it comes to the process of refining to enrich uranium to weapons-grade and the process of enrichment, or even transitioning to other minerals, such as plutonium, the whole process, things could go wrong. So many things could go wrong. And then eventually, when it comes, now they have the nuclear weapons. Of course, what's happened to Japan? Very unfortunate situation. And also, how do you think you get rid of nuclear weapons subsequently?

Robin Möser: You mean a proliferation is a risk in general?

Victor Chelashow: That kind of begs the question: How do you get rid of nuclear weapons? So, other than just use, which most people try to defend, you know, as long as they're not us, then we're good. No, it's not like that. Even just the fact that you have that people pay their lives with? Yeah, so I think the whole thing, just pretty much to summarize it, I think nuclear weapons represents a structure, for me it's more of a symbol, actually, other than just what it is. It's a symbol of coloniality. Because people of color are predominantly affected by it. You have women and children affected way more, and also doctors when it comes to Japan. So it represents everything that's wrong in our society, in our community, when you look at who has the nuclear weapons, who have the nuclear weapons being used against, who is it being used to threaten? So, I think it's just messed up every single little bit of it.

Robin Möser: So, in addressing this, where do you think the focus of the civil society should be? I gathered from your opinion it should be a total elimination of nukes, but what do you consider as practical steps towards achieving this goal? Is it more on a normative level? I'm interested to hear that.

Victor Chelashow: Interesting. So, I think we have to appreciate that we may not get all the strides that you want, I mean, nuclear weapons will not get eliminated tomorrow. Although I would wish that would happen, but pretty much I know, it won't. And even if I tell the leaders of the United States that nuclear weapons are bad. They know, they're very much aware of the impacts that they have. So, I think we have to be realistic and approach and also pace ourselves so that we don't get exhausted and we don't get depressed. So, I think the role of civil societies, I think, is to make a little push every day, just make some steps. And then little by little, we gonna get to where we're going. So, I think focusing our energy, at where we can get some small wins, small inputs, of course, there are big to us, small wins. And I think one of the key areas where we can get that is into to identifying intersectionalities. For me, for instance, what would work best for me here in Africa, is the intersectional approach. When you talk about African nuclear weapons, this is one area that I've pursued with NYUKLIA EUREKA, we got Africans Against the Bomb. So, we're trying to educate Africans about nuclear weapons and then from there, we would be able to maybe influence the TPNW to be absorbed more. And then little by little, they'll get to a point where we isolate countries that possess nuclear weapons, so that we

stigmatize it and then maybe from there, once we have locked them, when we have cornered them, then from there, I think, we can give them the final blow. So, I think little by little is to advance the TPNW, it's a very such strategic approach to universalize it. But for us to universalize TPNW, like I said, we need tons of mass education. Not so many people care about nuclear weapons, and some people took advantage of this opportunity. When Putin, for the first time in my generation, you know, threatened to use nuclear bombs and suddenly it became all nuclear weapons. We still have to come up with plans to disarm, they can be used. So, finding this opportune moment to further public education, like I said, before identifying intersectionality especially with things like climate change, feminism, also movements that tie with decolonization, because I think these are pretty strong movements currently. Anyone who stands against them stands to lose. So, if we robe nuclear weapons into the movements, then suddenly we're gonna reap some rewards. So, I think the three cases of priority for me are: universalizing the TPNW and public education, and identifying intersectionality and then moving forward. But of course, that includes tons of other areas, including research, and not to mention victim assistance, people who have suffered the catastrophic effects that they publish or have heard from them in various platforms. And I think there are certainly other areas, but just for me, in my context, where I am, this three areas are top priorities.

Robin Möser: In following up on one point, another interview partner told me that she finds the language, the terms and definitions that are used to discuss these issues oftentimes exclusive for Africans and for people of the global south generally. In particular when they want to participate in the debates centering on nuclear disarmament and what comes with it. Would you agree that the language should be more inclusive to cater for all those concerned and not just the experts talking? The issues that are at stake in Geneva or in Vienna at the IAEA?

Victor Chelashow: Yeah and that's really one of the concerns that we identified in NYUKLIA EUREKA. The disarmament discourse has been futed so much in the Global North. And a lot of neglect is happening with global south. And when you look at, you know, historically, who had nuclear weapons but they dismantled, it comes to South Africa. Where are the most signatories of the TPNW? 34, I think, they are in Africa! But when it comes to conferences, when it comes to discussions, when it comes to publications, you have lots of them coming from the Global North. So, it sort of shows the contrast, even within our own community, in our own spaces, where we should feel comfortable, but then you feel alienated because of such issues. And I think in the recent survey that was done for the November 2023 meeting in New York, the Meeting of the State Parties, we had 69% of the participants coming from, you know, Western countries with very, very little representation from the Global South. So it's not just in terms of language, I think it's the representation in the whole disarmament discourse. It is very disproportionate. And then very unfortunate at the same time.

Robin Möser: There was an interesting opinion piece by Samuel Olamide in the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, I think you read this, and he discussed the visa problems Africans faced to attempt the New York meeting. Yeah, this is very interesting and quite telling when you look at rates of African or global south participants to these conferences, not mentioning the lack of institutional funding that is often not there to attend and make these trips. Very expensive to go from an African capital by plane to New York, unlike going from London, Paris, Amsterdam, you name it. Yeah. I have another question: What do you see as the biggest failure in the field of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation since the end of the Cold War? And could you maybe pinpoint some failures that had lasting consequences until today?

Victor Chelashow: So, I think one of the key challenges would be maybe the failure to have a platform for affected voices. That's where I think the movement slept, sort of was in a deep slumber for the longest time. Until, you know, quite recently, and up to the 80s, maybe when you had the likes of IPPNW being formed. And a lot of these issues coming up, but way from 1940s up to 1980s, there was nothing going on, but we had people being affected in Japan, we had South Africa dismantling the nuclear weapons shortly after that, but I think throughout this period, even right now, as we speak, for instance, people who have been affected in all steps of manufacturing nuclear weapons, largely go swept under the carpet. And I think it was one of the most genuine concerns I had from the hypocrisy of people who say, they felt so sad that, you know, their generation that, they were pretty sure, were the last generations getting to hear the voice one on one. And they were so concerned that moving forward the issue of victim assistance, the issue of platforming voices of those who have been affected is going to go swept under the rug. And I think these are the most important voices. It's one thing to quote data and research as politicians or someone who was in a position of power, but telling them the lived experiences, sharing with them what it was like, having a nuclear bomb being dropped on your city. I think that's the most powerful tool, I think when it comes to focusing on lived experiences. And the voices going unrecognized or the being outright shushed and being, you know, being told to shut up because these are things of the past. I think it's one of the most the biggest barrier to achieving nuclear disarmament.

Robin Möser: I agree. I agree with that. And you mentioned an interesting point: you said that the processes of uranium mining, uranium refining, and these kinds of things, in, for example, African countries, like the Congo, or Namibia, and I think also Gabon, they are not really known to a wider public. Nobody, hardly anybody looks at workers and engages with their experience in the process of getting these precious raw materials to actually then produce or enrich uranium for weapons purposes. So, that should be made visible too, I guess.

Victor Chelashow: Yeah, absolutely. So, I think, maybe one of the group of people who have been a little bit successful when it comes to trying to, you know, share the experience at Marshallese people. People who live in the Marshall Islands, where the US did the testing the bombs. And also some Kazakhstani individuals, but their voices are not being heard, to be honest. But at least not to the degree that I think they need to be heard.

Robin Möser: And the French people tested weapons in Algeria, and I think Niger or Mali, I'm not sure about the second state. So, that was in the 60s 70s, I guess. Do we have any voices recorded of the people who endured this?

Victor Chelashow: Thank you, Sir, right!

Robin Möser: And what do you see as the most important milestones for the nuclear field to address these issues? You mentioned education?

Victor Chelashow: Yeah, so, I think number one is the realization that to nuclear weapons there's no meaningful medical response, or just humanitarian response at large. I think that realizing that was the spark and so I count that as a very big step. And then capacity building. You then had civil society organizations coming up, starting from the 80s. Moving forward up to now where you have large international organizations doing a lot of disarmament work. So, I think that was the first time. And secondly, when the TPNW came into force, so the whole process of actualizing it, conceptualizing it, to

actually enforcing it, I count that a very big, you know, moment for humanity as a whole, not just for us as disarmament enthusiasts, but for the rest of the planet. So, I think for me, these are the key two things that that really push me, that give me hope and encouragement. And I know part of the third one will be eventual banning of nuclear weapons or at least something of the sort. But for me these two remain the key landmarks when I look back across time, yes.

Robin Möser: Okay. And following up on this, your work and I mean under the IPPNW umbrella, what are the partners and other organizations you teamed up with? I guess ICAN, for example, but could you list some names, some partner organizations and the nature of your collaboration and cooperation with them in terms of working together?

Victor Chelashow: Yeah, so starting off with IPPNW who issued the call where everything falls under. So, one of the key organizations that I reached out to was the Youth for TPNW, and I tried my best to get IPPNW to sign up as a partner, in particular. So we usually have sort of bilateral ties that go beyond me when, you know, I'm no longer in the board of IPPNW, but I still have connections, we still have some structures of partnership going on. And we will speak together in conferences. So, maybe during the end of the conference, I invite the chair for Youth for TPNW to come through. And when you have Youth for TPNW webinars or even in person demonstrations, then you have lots of IPPNW individuals coming in and joining. So I think this was a very, very significant relationship. Youth for TPNW would be one, Africans Against the Bomb would come number two, especially with local affiliates within Africa, in Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa. This is where we have a lot of activities with the Youth for TPNW, where I personally did a lot of consulting with them, especially the media experts, people who have done, you know, a bachelor's in communications, international relations, because there's some things just go right over my head. But they understand it more because it's in their area of expertise. So, we also share some of our skills, some of what we've learned, and also, of course, we help them when it comes to the humanitarian or the medical inputs of nuclear weapons. And then thirdly, we have ICAN who have been very significant in the movement, I think that I would say they were the top funders when it comes to the activities. Maybe we have a day where we make some advocacy action all across the globe, then we had ICAN coming through helping us when I was working with Youth for TPNW, but also the people who received funding from in both capacities. And that just that, but they also helped us with advocacy messages, designing posters, and also in-person advocacy events, such as during the MSP, they really came through for us. They got lots of advocates, especially from the Global South, going to the conferences and supporting them in the process. So, I think these are the three key ones, but then you also have others. Mainly, I worked with ones that deal with youth or like have some youth aspects to them. So, we have UNODA, the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs in Geneva. Yeah. They're really brilliant. They've given us the opportunity for spaces in the high level places, where we would not ordinarily get our message across. But there they were. We also have "Reverse the Trend". "Reverse the Trend". So, they work mostly with Marshallese youth, who they again tried to platform their voices as much as they can, who also, of course, give us their lived experiences in the in the Marshall Islands, the Kenny islands, and what the audio was like for them, but of course, we also have been IPPNW affiliates all over the globe like IPPNW Japan, IPPNW Germany, and the affiliation institutions such as Physicians for Social Responsibility. So, this really have been a cornerstone and other shoulders upon which we stand.

Robin Möser: Did you or IPPNW specifically interact with any academic institutions or think tanks? Did you use open source literature to prepare your briefings, papers etc.?

Victor Chelashow: Yeah, so in IPPNW they have the journal, the MCS, the Medical, Conflict and Survival. So, other than that, of course, they interact with other channels, I think the paper they published in 2023 was published in Oxford, and I know there's a lot of interaction between the UK affiliate called Medat. And it's top universities, including Oxford who can, you know, have very big influence in terms of publication, in terms of research. So, in various capacities and levels, you have each affiliate sort of interacting with the most influential, I'd say, institutions in their region, in their space.

Robin Möser: Did you perceive them throughout these interactions as helpful and proactive towards IPPNW?

Victor Chelashow: Yes. They're mostly symbiotic, I'd say, where we help each other. So it's bilateral. It's to a partnership, so that's the situation.

Robin Möser: And ICAN has a local chapter in Nairobi, right?

Victor Chelashow: Yeah, they have an affiliation in Nairobi. And so through that, I support that affiliate activities, especially when they had a transition of the focal person. So, when she left and we had a new one, then she tried to get into that space, trying to catch up and to speed up. This was a very crucial moment for me to step up and sort of help get the bearing and also, luckily, she went ahead to become the chair for Youth for TPNW, okay. Yeah, sort of, we try to help each other during demonstrations, fundraising, brainstorming ideas, to get our principals through to politicians.

Robin Möser: And with other civil society organizations in Kenya or Eastern Africa, did you also engage? I mean, we've now discussed UNODA and ICAN, but more local organizations? Raising awareness was at first not problematic, but important, because there was no education and no knowledge about these issues. But did other civil society organizations, I don't want to say bandwagoning the process - did you team up also join forces with them, potentially?

Victor Chelashow: Yeah, so one of the key people that I teamed up with was a friend of mine in Uganda, his name is Nyombi Morris. He is a very big climate change activist and advocate. At the same time he has more clout, more publicity, his message gets out more. And being from the climate change space also sort of helped us push your message across, especially after the intersectionality. And we also had a team of medical students from Makerere University in Uganda, who already understand the biophysical effects of radiation from nuclear weapons, who, I think, also teamed up with some local activists in the area to try to get the message across. And in Tanzania during last year conference, we have a team that came from an organization that basically tries to stop uranium mining and hold those multinationals who mined it, accountable. Not just in Tanzania, but also in DRC. So they've been very helpful, very crucial, when it comes to raising awareness about the process of mining and shedding light on some of the impacts that they see in their communities. So, I think that this, this has been very crucial. But then again, we've also had a lot of movements, especially called the ACRL call the African Council of Religious Leaders, also called Religions for Peace. So, when we tried to get this message across, I think they're sort of gatekeepers of the community. People listen to religious leaders more here compared to someone they barely know. So, they have also been very crucial when it comes to helping us put our message across. Okay. Yeah.

Robin Möser: So was the focus rather on East African or across different regions of the Continent?

Victor Chelashow: Right, it was mostly within East Africa, because this is where we're trying to promote the TPNW. And we know we have the East Africa legislative council and other legal bodies that if maybe we get TPNW in one country, then it would be very easy for the rest of these other countries to follow through. So, that's our thinking.

Robin Möser: And I would be interested where you, for example, made contact with Nyombi Morris or the people from the Council for African Religious Leaders. Was this contact made through TPNW for a or ICAN? How did you actually get them cooperate with you?

Victor Chelashow: So, it's been very varied. I've connected with some just via Twitter. Sometimes I just start typing nuclear disarmament and just scroll through the news. Yeah, that's what I do sometimes. And then we have others I've met through the first meeting of the state parties of the TPNW.

Robin Möser: Did you actually go to New York last year?

Victor Chelashow: No, it wasn't possible. It was a whole visa situation that I couldn't make it in time. And so other than that, we had at least the ACRL, the African Council of Religious Leaders, was a TPNW allied organization, they had some ties way back to 2011. So, it was just leveraging on some of the partnerships that had been formed. But this other ones, it was it was just mostly through being introduced by people, who have reached out to some people in IPPNW or even through some conferences as medical students. And yeah, so I got to this point, also because I used to attend those conferences, try to get my message across and then robbing people who are interested. So, also in person meetings.

Robin Möser: And we touched on this briefly earlier, but do you generally think that the debate about global nuclear disarmament includes recognition of the gendered impact of nuclear weapons? I mean the discourse around it?

Victor Chelashow: I think the gendered element is a little bit lacking, unfortunately, I think it's not well explored. There's tons of opportunities in there. But I would say a lot of strides are also being made at the same time. I read a paper about one that focuses not just on the gender aspect, but like the gender aspect, compounded women of color, who are being affected predominantly. It changed my mind, but then I would have loved to see more and more papers coming out in the journals. But for now, as it stands, I don't think we've even scratched the surface at all.

Robin Möser: I think important work being done, for example, by WILPF, the Women's International League of Peace and Freedom, but other institutions tend to focus on other issues. But do you think as an IPPNW activist, your voice or your institution's voice is heard and then also represented in ICAN's leadership decisions in their campaign? Three, four years back in the TPNW campaign and even now, for the ratification and things like that, are the local African voices heard or is it a message of the Global North reproduced?

Victor Chelashow: So, I think within IPPNW, as physicians, I think we have a little bit of influence, but I don't want to overstate it. And people tend to listen to us a little bit more, especially to speak from a point of authority.

So from an IPPNW perspective, when you speak as a physician from a scientific and examined perspective, then you have very high chances of being listened to and your work that you're putting up

being taken seriously at the same time. But then you have a lot of contrasts when, you know, when it comes to the other side, when you're not a physician anymore. Well, I'm a physician, but then when you're a black person, and I think that's the variables that come in, okay, things are flowing on the other side, but then on this other side, then no. Because one, when it comes to the conferences where big decisions are made it's underrepresentation. Not just in terms of funding, the whole visa process like we highlighted, but also you know, access to these spaces is very crowded, it's very gatekept, but it's very helpful for you to permeate through. So, I'd say in this in this space, as a black person, it doesn't work out for us, not at all. Only when your voice needs to be, I don't say used, but let me just say used. Because that's when you are useful to them, it comes in handy. Yeah, we have representatives, but that, you know, is often just to showcase diversity and inclusion. But then, when it comes to the actual content, the matter of the ground, nope, nothing goes through. No, I wouldn't say we're being listened to or even being taken seriously, for that matter. So, I would say, it's a very bitterful situation.

Robin Möser: Do you generally feel that through your engagement, I mean IPPNW is a global actor in that sense, but through your work, do you actually think that African voices have been heard more or at least made more visible in the discourse on a global scale? I mean the TPNW enjoyed strong support by African countries, and I think as you rightly pointed out earlier, most of Africa's countries had signed and also then the majority have ratified the treaty. Did this push, for instance, the African agenda a little bit more? Or is this a too positive view I have?

Victor Chelashow: I would say in as much as we feel that way, we're also not sitting on our hands feeling helpless, because they're not gonna listen to us, we have to go to those places, and push them to listen to us. That's the approach we take. We have to go there, we have to take it, we don't sit back. So, I think most importantly, it has flared up, it has started a fire in me when it came to notice of the situation, and also collaborating with other fellow Africans, you know, like Vanessa Hanson , if you know how from ICAN. We already knew how the situation was going to be. So, we were well prepared to take up space for us, because it's not gonna get given to us. So, I think my impulse number one, has been largely felt within Africans who are passionate in this area. Because we support each other, protect each other, you have to do this. So, I think those are the people who have mostly felt my impact through encouragement. But then also on the outside people, because I took up space and I came out to speak and I'm active in this space, who then get to sit back and reflect and absorb my perspectives and resonated with me, and also helped me elevate me and give me platforms. Some of them are given a sponsorship to come to the conference or even just proofreading the manuscript for journal, which is brilliant. So, I'd say in as much as there are people who don't listen, there are also other people who are very eager to support you. They're dying to give you a chance. So, I think for those who have no issues with race, then I think together we've amplified the voices and brought this issue a little bit more home. But then for other people, you know, there's nothing we can do about it. But I'd say we pushed the African agenda more, we've shown that it's possible to collaborate between the global north and the global south on this particular matter. And also at home, I've also showed people it's possible to take up the spaces.

Robin Möser: Would you what say that IPPNW and ICAN are organizations who actively facilitate this exchange and this collaboration across, say the global north-south divide? Or do you see intra-organizational barriers to that?

Victor Chelashow: No, of course, I think they play both sides. They like the defender and attacker at the same time, I have to say, in spaces that I was involved in. But I'd speak more about IPPNW, because I'm more familiar with them because I operated in the space for a while. So, I'd say the IPPNW has facilitated significantly. And I'm going to single out two affiliates. Actually three, the one in Germany. They've been very supportive of this entire process, from the medical peacework conferences, webinars, the online materials, and with that, of course, comes with nuclear disarmament. I even traveled to Berlin. Yeah. So in the end together during conferences usually we have collaborative sessions where it's between Kenya and Germany, and it's usually so nice, I think, to have this collaborations. I'd say particularly for that affiliate I can speak for them. They've been very nice all through, of course, we would have some barriers, some challenges, but also like I'd say within IPPNW collaboration is given priority more. And any group that's within IPPNW that's not representative, that, you know, looks a bit problematic, they would be told, you know, but never comes to that because people within IPPNW who in itself was structured to be very representative of the regions, of the affiliates. Then within ICAN, I cannot say much to be honest, because I don't quite know how they do it.

Robin Möser: I have two, three more questions, which I'm just posing. How would you define impact in your field? And could you give a concrete example, where the IPPNW has made impact and how did you achieve it?

Victor Chelashow: So I think, within IPPNW, I'd say one of the biggest impact came through, of course, through different individuals, because they are very impactful. So, I think, for me, one of the most essential things is having supported ICAN, to establish it, to give it support. I think within IPPNW, that's one of the biggest landmarks. And of course, that's comes with getting a Nobel Peace Prize, we shared it, we celebrated it, we feel like it's ours also at the same time. So, I think that's one, but then the other one, I'd say came through Dr. Ira Helfand. So, he put together and with other centers, they published the Nuclear Famine Report, they did the first one. The first paper, and similar reports, they also edited a second report, which has been the cornerstone of all the work that we do here in East Africa, when it comes to connecting climate change and nuclear weapons. And this is the tool that we used to drive the agenda for TPNW with. So, I think in terms of research, IPPNW has done really well, of course, we still have a lot of milestones to cover, I hope in the coming years we will do that. But I think these two really come to mind at first, but then, of course, affiliates all over the world are doing tremendous jobs. And an example includes Dr. Dennis Onazi, in Nigeria, who, you know, one of her patients turned out to be a very senior person in the government and through that connection they managed to ratify the TPNW in Nigeria. So, we have a lot of strides being made at affiliate levels that I may not be aware of, but just these two, three instances, really showcases part of success, to me at least.

Robin Möser: Okay, you now switched to my next question, I asked impact, and you started with impact and then you went over to success. I think it's, you know, both are very much connected. And if you have impact as advocacy institution and organization, it's also a success. So, I think we can move on with that question. Just to clarify; impact and success in that context is it for you more or less equal?

Victor Chelashow: Yeah. Yeah. I would say.

Robin Möser: I see it in the same way. And then my last question would be looking into the future, and what are your main expectations for the future of the field of nuclear disarmament and non-

proliferation? Where do you expect the field to go to in the next, say, 10, 20 years or even 50 years? You can think freely.

Victor Chelashow: So, I think I have things that I would like to see with the discourse I think within the discourse, I'd like to see more representation more diversity and more people of color being given priority. And their voices being taken seriously, they need to be platformed, not just out of pity or because they have to fill their diversity quarter, but because they believe by involving these people, then you can grow the movement going forward and objectives being achieved faster. So, I think this realization needs to come first. And I think that's one key area, and not just people of color, but we also have young voices. I mean, we know most of us are just two, five years out of college, or some of us are still in college, but there's some things that you've learned. And there's some strengths that you have, that other people may not necessarily have. So, I think I'd like to see global north partnerships and intergenerational dialogues happening a little bit more. I would start within the movement. And then just speaking broadly, of course, I'd like to see nuclear weapons being done away with, I'd like to see that TPNW being universalized, and having more frequent interactions, maybe within the movement, because this is how we grow. And of course, the only other two key ways that we can really follow things through is research and advocacy. So, I like to see more research and then advocacy that's founded on this research also coming up. So that's why I'm also trying to leverage a lot of my efforts. Now I'm delving more into research, as I get to learn more about this field.

Robin Möser: You mentioned the intergenerational exchange, but I think what sets you apart and what brings in a new focus is that you see the issue of nuclear disarmament connected to other fields like climate change, and these kinds of things, gender equality. I think that was not addressed simultaneously, earlier on by the peace movements of the 70s or 80s. I think that was not the case. And I think that brings in a fresh perspective; it's not so fresh anymore, because it's five to 10 years old, the discussion around the TPNW and what comes with it. So yeah, I think that is a very stimulating view that your generation brings in to the debate.

Victor Chelashow: Yeah, I think so too, connecting it with other social justice movements, really adds to it.

Robin Möser: Well, the SDGs also. I mean they might be more or less regarded as a creation by the global north, but you still have issues that are areas of work to do that could be combined with work on this element and standards in the mining sector and these kind of things.

Victor Chelashow: Absolutely, absolutely.

Robin Möser: I'm through with my questions, Victor. And unless there's anything you want to add and contribute, you can also write me later if something pops up in your head. Otherwise, I will stop the recording now. Is that fine with you?

Victor Chelashow: Yeah. Yeah, that sounds fine. That sounds brilliant. Thank you!