

Nobel Peace Prize 2024

Alfred Nobel's legacy as a legal obligation

War must be abolished

by Dr. Sabine Vuilleumier-Koch, MD* Switzerland

On 11 October, the "Norwegian Nobel Committee" will announce which person, organisation or institution will receive the prestigious Nobel Peace Prize in 2024. After an eight-month process of thoroughly reviewing all nominees, the committee selects a winner. Since the first Nobel Peace Prize was awarded in 1901, there has been repeated controversy as to whether the choice made was truly in line with the wishes of Alfred Nobel (1833–1896).

Comprehensive critique

The Norwegian lawyer and peace activist *Fredrik S. Heffermehl*, who passed away on 21 December 2023 at the age of 86 at his home near Oslo, is known for his critique. He was a leading member of the Norwegian peace movement, the *International Association of Lawyers Against Nuclear Arms* (IALANA) and Vice President of the International Peace Bureau from 1985 to 2000. His work was characterised by an unwavering commitment to peace and disarmament.¹ As a lawyer, he had studied *Alfred Nobel's* will in detail and researched the Nobel Committee archives for those who had been nominated for the Nobel Prize but not chosen. Due to the fifty-year secrecy requirement, he could only do this for the period from 1901 to the early 1970s. In his latest book, published in Norwegian in 2020 and in English in 2023, he describes in detail how he found the best ideas and people for peace in these archives.

"The Real Nobel Peace Prize.

A Squandered Opportunity to Abolish War"

Fredrik S. Heffermehl's book is presented on its own homepage as follows:²

"In his new book, 'The True Nobel Peace Prize', the author and lawyer *Fredrik S. Heffermehl* explains how *Alfred Nobel* recognised what was to come

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Oslo, 10 December 2017. ICAN, represented by Setsuko Thurlow and Beatrice Fihn, receive the Nobel Peace Prize Medal and Diploma. (© The Nobel Foundation 2017. Picture Ken Opprann)

over 50 years before the first atomic bomb and established a prize to free humanity from the scourge of war. Instead of cultivating enemies, we must cultivate cooperation, unity, common and globally applicable laws – there is no other way to security than to eliminate the military threat to us all.

Almost all of us have a deep desire for the madness of war to end. This will not happen by itself, but only if we pull ourselves together, across all borders and convictions. History teaches us that no technology, no matter how deadly, will ever save us from new wars; fighter planes, supersonic missiles, and atomic bombs achieve exactly the opposite. How can we turn things around?

In the book, Heffermehl evaluates the work of the Norwegian Prize Committee and shows how it has never fulfilled its main task of clarifying and promoting the noble purpose of the Alfred Nobel Prize. Only about 32% of all prizes awarded correspond to the main purpose of the Nobel Prize: a demilitarisation of international relations. The book also offers an unprecedented evaluation of who should have received the prizes from 1901 to 2022. This study, which makes up the main part of the book, is a unique listing of the forces, people and ideas that wanted to turn the tide and create a new, demilitarised world order.

The result is a very different perspective on history, an analysis that reveals a panorama of people and ideas that have been suppressed by the social forces for whom peace would be bad for business and who therefore keep all nations, all of us, trapped in an ever-expanding, high-risk system. Since nations

seem unable to break out of their dysfunctional patterns, initiatives to build a new, cooperative world order must come from elsewhere. The author points to civil society organisations, cities, trade unions – and the Nobel Peace Prize. In his new book [..], Heffermehl emphasises that the Norwegian Nobel Committee is legally obliged to serve the Nobel idea and that it is the task of the Norwegian parliament to elect a committee that will serve the visionary idea of Alfred Nobel to secure world peace.”

The EU was wrongly awarded the prize

The *Nobel Peace Center* in Oslo, which opened in 2005,³ provides an overview of the previous winners and their work. The candidates nominated by a well-defined group of people go through a process of evaluations and reviews by the permanent advisors of the Nobel Committee and other Norwegian or international experts. It is not difficult to imagine the associated possibility of political influence by interested parties. In 2012, three Nobel Prize winners protested against the awarding of the Peace Prize to the EU. The choice of the EU misses the point in at least two ways: “1. The EU is not striving to achieve Nobel’s demilitarised global peace order. 2. The EU and the member states tacitly endorse military force and wage wars instead of insisting on the need for an alternative approach.”⁴ – A protest that can be emphasised twice today.

At its last meeting, the committee makes its final decision. Whether the decision of this year’s five-member committee, elected by the Norwegian parliament, the *Storting*, and chaired by the youngest-ever president, 39-year-old political scientist *Jørgen Watne Frydnes*, corresponds to Alfred Nobel’s testamentary will, we will be able to verify on 11 October.

According to his will of 1895, the last fifth of the interest from Nobel’s wealth should go each year to the “peace advocate” who has “most or best worked for the fraternisation of peoples and the abolition or reduction of standing armies, as well as the holding and promotion of peace congresses”. Alfred Nobel’s will is legally binding.



Oslo, February 2024. Nobel Peace Center. (Picture jpv)

Abolish nuclear weapons – 2017 Nobel Peace Prize

The Nobel Peace Prize is awarded each year on 10 December, the anniversary of Alfred Nobel’s death, at a ceremony in the presence of the Norwegian royal family at Oslo’s City Hall.

In 2017, the speeches by *Beatrice Fihn*, director of ICAN (*International Campaign for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons*) and *Setsuko Thurlow* on the occasion of her organisation being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize were very touching.⁵ “The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons provides the pathway forward at a moment of great global crisis. It is a light in a dark time. And more than that, it provides a choice. A choice between two endings: the end of nuclear weapons or the end of us.”

In view of the “insanity” of today’s geopolitical situation, a strong commitment to peace is urgently needed.

(Translation Swiss Standpoint)

¹<https://swiss-standpoint.ch/news-detailansicht-en-gesellschaft/fredrik-heffermehl-fighter-for-the-ethics-of-the-nobel-peace-prize.html>

² Fredrik S. Heffermehl, *The Real Nobel Peace Prize. A Squandered Opportunity to Abolish War*, <https://realnobelppeace.org/the-book/>

³ <https://www.nobelpeacecenter.org/en>

⁴ *Zeit-Fragen* Nr. 51, 3 December 2012, paper version

⁵ <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2017/ican/lecture/>