



# The Right Livelihood Award

*for outstanding vision and work on behalf of our planet and its people*

Daniel Ellsberg (USA)

(2006)



*for putting peace and truth first, at considerable personal risk, and dedicating his life to inspiring others to follow his example.*

Daniel Ellsberg  
Photo: Jock McDonald

**Daniel Ellsberg is a former Pentagon official, who followed his conscience and leaked secret information about the US government lies on the war in Vietnam – the so-called Pentagon papers. Ellsberg has ever since campaigned for peace and encouraged others to speak truth to power.**

## Career

Daniel Ellsberg was born in 1931, graduated from Harvard in economics in 1952, served in the US Marine Corps from 1954-57, and obtained a PhD in economics from Harvard while working for the Rand Corporation in 1962.

His academic specialisation was decision-making under uncertainty, and this was his focus as a strategic analyst at Rand, which he joined in 1959. Specifically his focus was on the command and control of nuclear weapons and the guidance to nuclear war plans. In 1959-60 he became a consultant to the Commander-in-Chief Pacific and during 1961-64 to the Departments of Defense

and State at the White House, specialising in crises relating to nuclear decision-making. In 1964 he joined the Defense Department to work principally on decision-making in the Vietnam War his first day there coincided with the Tonkin Gulf incident which sparked the eight-year bombing of Vietnam. In the next five years, which included a spell of two years actually in Vietnam on the front line, he became progressively disillusioned with the war. This period culminated in 1969 in his decision that he had to do what he could to stop the Vietnam War.

### **Revealing the truth about Vietnam**

Ellsberg had already passed top-secret papers to the press to influence presidential decision-making and that was what he decided to do again. He had just finished reading a 7,000 page top secret study of decision-making in Vietnam under four administrations, for which he had drafted one of the volumes. In October 1969 he started copying this and passing it to Senator Fulbright, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. When Fulbright did nothing, and after the invasion of Laos and Cambodia, he gave it to the New York Times, then the Washington Post and, when injunctions not to publish rained down on these papers, to seventeen other newspapers. The Pentagon Papers were out. They showed that the government had misled the US public about the war in Vietnam.

While the Supreme Court voided the injunctions as being contrary to the First Amendment, Ellsberg was arrested and indicted on twelve counts of felony. However, President Nixon was so concerned that Ellsberg might have even more sensitive papers that he would leak, that he illegally arranged the burglary of Ellsberg's former psychoanalyst, hoping to find information with which to blackmail Ellsberg into silence. This became part of the Watergate scandal, which led to Nixon's resignation and, ultimately, the end of the Vietnam War.

### **Working for peace**

On the grounds of the governmental misconduct against him, Ellsberg's case was dismissed by the courts in 1973. Since this time, he has been working for peace and nuclear disarmament. In 1975-76 he was involved (as organiser, participant and fundraiser) in the Continental Walk for Peace and Social Justice. For several years he was on the National Strategy Task Force of the Freeze Campaign, and later served on the Board of SANE-Freeze. He has taken part in scores of actions and estimates that he has been arrested 70 times, most recently in protests against the Iraq War near the Bush ranch in Texas. He campaigned against the neutron bomb and later against the development of Cruise and Pershing, in Europe as well as the US. He sailed on a Greenpeace boat to protest against Soviet nuclear testing. He considers that it was the popular success of the Freeze campaign against Cruise that caused President Reagan to propose the 'zero option' on intermediate-range missiles in Europe, which the Soviets unexpectedly accepted, terminating the development of Cruise and Pershing in Europe.

In 1992, with Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR), Ellsberg launched Manhattan Project II, aiming to achieve a consensus among anti-nuclear, arms control and disarmament groups on a comprehensive program of concrete steps to end the nuclear arms race and proliferation and bring about radical reduction in nuclear arms and ultimate abolition. The consensus was achieved but of this programme, only a test ban treaty has been achieved (as a result of decades of activism), and that is under grave threat with current US policy.

### **Calling to patriotic whistleblowing**

One of Ellsberg's insights when he became disaffected with the Vietnam War was that the President's ability to escalate, his entire strategy throughout the war, had depended on secrecy and lying and thus on his ability to deter unauthorized disclosures truth telling by officials.

The parallels with the Iraq War were obvious, and in 2004 Ellsberg founded the Truth-Telling Project to encourage the insiders to expose official lying. The Project started with an op-ed in The New York Times in the run up to the Iraq War and was launched in September 2003 with a letter signed by eleven former officials. It was a 'Call to Patriotic Whistleblowing' and involved both Katharine Gun

from the UK and Frank Grevil from Denmark, who had been indicted for whistleblowing in their own countries. The Project has given rise to the National Security Whistleblowers Coalition (NSWBC), started and directed by Sibel Edmonds, an FBI whistleblower who was one of the original signers of the Call. It now contains over 60 former officials from national security agencies. Since 2004, Ellsberg has given more than 60 speeches on this and on the parallels between Iraq, Vietnam and, most recently, the developing crisis in relation to Iran.

### Quotation

*It is urgent to prevent new U.S. aggression. The time is now for the world to say no to U.S. threats of air attack against Iran, and to the very notion of a nuclear first-use option by America or any other nation.*

Daniel Ellsberg

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