



International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War



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Nuclear weapons – always inhumane and unacceptable, now illegal

IPPNW welcomes 3 states ratifications and imminent entry into legal force of the historic Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

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Today at the United Nations in New York, Honduras, joined Jamaica, and Nauru from the day before in becoming the most recent nations to ratify the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) – bringing the total number of countries that have ratified the nuclear ban treaty to 50. By crossing the 50 ratification threshold, this means that in 90 days, on 22 January 2021, this treaty will enter into legal force and become international law, binding on the states that have already ratified it, and all those which subsequently ratify the treaty.

International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) first warned 40 years ago that nuclear war would be the ultimate human and environmental disaster, and called for the elimination of nuclear weapons. Outlawing these genocidal weapons, which IPPNW has been working for since founding the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) in 2007, is an essential step toward the prevention of nuclear war, and the TPNW's entry into force is an enormous win for planetary health.

The growing danger

The treaty is especially needed in the face of the real and present danger of nuclear war climbing higher than ever. The hands of the Doomsday Clock stand further forward than they have ever been: 100 seconds to midnight. All nine nuclear-armed states are modernizing their arsenals with new, more accurate and 'useable' weapons; their leaders making irresponsible explicit nuclear threats. The cold war is resurgent – hard won treaties reducing nuclear weapons numbers and types are being trashed, while nothing is being negotiated to replace them, let alone build on them. If the Trump administration allows the New START Treaty to expire, then from 5 Feb 2021, for the first time since 1972, there will be no treaty constraints on Russian and US nuclear weapons. Armed conflicts which could trigger nuclear escalation are increasing in a climate-stressed world. The rapidly evolving threat of cyberwarfare puts nuclear command and control in jeopardy from both nations and terrorist groups. Close to two thousand nuclear weapons remain on hair-trigger alert, ready to be launched within minutes of a leader's fateful decision.

The radioactive incineration unleashed by nuclear war involving even less than 1% of the global nuclear arsenal targeted on cities in one part of the world would be followed by a worldwide nuclear ice age and nuclear famine, putting billions of people in jeopardy.

As the World Health Organisation and Red Cross/Red Crescent have confirmed, health and emergency services could not respond substantively to the needs of the victims of even a single nuclear weapon exploded on a city. When there is no cure, prevention is imperative.

In this profound crisis the vision and opportunity provided by the TPNW is all the more crucial and urgent.

Treaties work

A consistent lesson is provided by experience with biological and chemical weapons, antipersonnel landmines and cluster munitions. Treaties which have codified the rejection of an unacceptable weapon in international law have provided a crucial basis and motivation for the progressive work of eliminating these weapons. Providing one legal standard for all nations has been essential to the substantial progress made in controlling banned weapons. All the weapons subject to treaty prohibition are now less often justified, produced, traded, deployed and used. No indiscriminate and inhumane weapon has been controlled or eliminated without first being prohibited.

Nine nuclear-armed states, the 30 nuclear-dependent members of NATO, Australia, Japan and South Korea appear unlikely to soon join the TPNW. Yet they are already being affected by it, just as they have been influenced by the other treaties banning inhumane weapons, even if they opposed and haven't joined them. Their hostility to the TPNW and shameful pressure on other states not to support or join it show that the treaty matters, stigmatises nuclear weapons and puts them on the wrong side of history. Already the world's largest sovereign wealth fund, major banks and pension funds have divested from companies manufacturing nuclear weapons. Now that the treaty is entering into force, every responsible financial institution should do the same.

The TPNW fills a gaping hole in international law that for far too long saw the most destructive weapon ever invented, the only weapon which poses an acute existential threat to all humanity and to the biosphere, as the only weapon of mass destruction not to be prohibited under international law.

In a dark time, the TPNW shines a light on the most promising path to free the world from the risk of indiscriminate nuclear violence. Not only does the treaty provide a comprehensive and categorical prohibition of nuclear weapons, it also provides the only internationally agreed framework for all nations to fulfil their legal obligation to eliminate nuclear weapons.

Further the TPNW obliges nations which join to provide long neglected assistance for the victims of nuclear weapons use and testing, and to undertake feasible remediation of environments contaminated by nuclear weapons use and testing.

The imminent entry into force of the TPNW provides a moment of truth. States that are serious about nuclear disarmament will join the treaty. Whatever their hyperbole, those that won't join are exposed as part of the problem rather than the solution.

We can

We are proud to have founded ICAN, which became the leading civil society campaign coalition working with governments to conclude the nuclear weapons ban treaty. For its work ICAN was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for 2017.

We are also proud to work closely with our health professional colleagues at the World Medical Association, International Council of Nurses, and World Federation of Public Health Associations, as well as the International Red Cross/Red Crescent movement, in speaking with united expert voice to the compelling and irrefutable evidence that any use of nuclear weapons would be an unmitigated catastrophe, for which no health and humanitarian response is possible, and therefore prevention through the abolition of nuclear weapons is the only responsible course of action.

The courage and commitment of many governments and diplomats, often in the face of reprehensible pressure from nuclear-armed states, made this landmark treaty a reality at the United Nations in New York on 7 July 2017. We are proud to work with them and look forward to continuing to work with them to consign the global suicide bombs that are nuclear weapons to the dustbin of history. We look forward to the first Meeting of States Parties in Vienna within the next 15 months to promote implementation of the treaty.

We call on all states to sign and ratify the treaty as a matter of utmost urgency and to faithfully implement it. Time is not on our side. The treaty provides our best hope against our worst weapons.

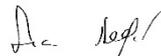
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