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United Nations Headquarters
New York

UN adopts historic ban on nuclear weapons

7 July 2017: The United Nations made history this morning when it adopted a [Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons](#), breaking a 20-year-plus deadlock in advancing multilateral nuclear disarmament. The Treaty prohibits states parties from using, developing, testing, producing, manufacturing, acquiring, possessing, stockpiling and transferring nuclear weapons, and from assisting or encouraging others to undertake these activities. It also prohibits them from threatening to use nuclear weapons. This is highly significant, as it can be interpreted as challenging the nuclear weapon states' doctrines of nuclear deterrence, which are based on an implicit threat to use nuclear weapons.

The final vote was an overwhelming endorsement of the Treaty: 122 states voted for, 1 opposed (NATO member the Netherlands) and 1 abstained (Singapore). The process has been driven by the growing recognition of, and deep concern at, the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons use and testing, which rejects the idea that there is any legitimate reason for maintaining, threatening to use, or using the weapons. Beatrice Fihn, Executive Director of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, stated: "No one believes that indiscriminately killing millions of civilians is acceptable – no matter the circumstance – yet that is what nuclear weapons are designed to do."

The Treaty strongly stigmatises nuclear weapons, bringing them closer to other indiscriminate, inhumane weapons that are banned under international law, such as chemical and biological weapons, anti-personnel landmines and cluster munitions. Prohibiting nuclear weapons will help to build political will for disarmament, and is a vital next step towards a comprehensive nuclear weapons convention that would provide for their complete elimination, like the enforceable conventions that exist to eliminate other weapons of mass destruction. States will now take the nuclear weapon prohibition treaty back to their capitals, to seek its signature and ratification. It will enter into force following ratification by 50 states.

Progressing nuclear disarmament is essential to ensure international peace and security, and indeed, human survival. While public attention to nuclear threats has waned, such threats are actually expanding, leading some experts like former US Secretary of Defence William Perry to [argue](#) that the risk of nuclear war is higher now than it was during the Cold War. In this regard, a recent UK

Guardian report [noted](#) that the rise of cyberattacks has drastically increased the risk of nuclear war. There are still 15,000 nuclear weapons, with almost 2000 Russian and US weapons on hair-trigger alert, ready for launch within 30 minutes. This situation has brought humanity to the brink of nuclear war several times already, through system failure, accident or miscalculation. In addition, recent research building on the climate models of the International Panel on Climate Change [shows](#) that even a “small” nuclear war using 0.1% of the current world arsenal would lead to rapid, radical climate change, leading to the starvation of up to 2 billion people due to crop failure.

Despite generally supporting bans on inhumane weapons, the five recognised nuclear weapon states and most of their allies, including Australia, boycotted these multilateral negotiations, which are designed to ban the most inhumane weapons ever invented. Yet as the Canberra Commission stated in 1996, the possession of nuclear weapons by any state is a constant stimulus to other states to acquire them. Recent North Korean nuclear and missile tests underscore this point, and offer a further demonstration of why it is essential to move swiftly towards nuclear disarmament.

New Zealand contributed strongly to the process of prohibiting nuclear weapons. It was among the leaders of the humanitarian initiative which helped build political will to pursue a new disarmament initiative. It also co-sponsored the UN resolution that kick-started negotiations, and has served as a vice-president of the negotiating conference for the nuclear weapon prohibition. The Disarmament & Security Centre calls on the New Zealand government to seize this historic opportunity to advance nuclear disarmament, by signing the Treaty as soon as it opens for signature on 20 September 2017.



Team Kiwi celebrates the adoption of the ban treaty, 7 July 2017, UN Headquarters, New York. (L-R: Lucy Stewart, Dr Kate Dewes, Charlotte Skerten (MFAT), Dr Anna Crowe, Prof. Roger Clark, Alice Osman, Assoc. Prof. Treasa Dunworth, Amb. Dell Higgie (MFAT), Katy Donnelly (MFAT), Michelle Podmore (MFAT), Richard Slade, Dr John Borrie, Dr Lyndon Burford, Cmdr Rob Green, RN Ret'd)

Background information / sources

1. "[Nuclear Ban Dailies](#)" (by expert disarmament organisation, Reaching Critical Will)
 - a. Latest version: [Simply banning nuclear weapons](#)
2. International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear weapons
 - a. <http://www.icanw.org/campaign-news/negotiations/>
 - b. Updates on government positions / statements, simple FAQs on the Treaty.
3. Prof. Tilman Ruff of Melbourne University / IPPNW
 - a. Excellent blog post summarising some details draft Treaty.
 - b. <https://peaceandhealthblog.com/2017/07/01/strong-ban-treaty/>
4. In the NZ context, www.nuclearfreeNZ30.org.nz
 - a. Blog posts / video interviews from NYC, plus info on 30th anniversary of NZ's nuclear free law (8 June 2017)
5. Official UN conference website
 - a. <https://www.un.org/disarmament/ptnw/index.html>

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