

# BAN NUCLEAR WEAPONS 2017



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**Image:** The United States detonates an atomic bomb underwater at Bikini atoll in the Marshall Islands in 1946. Its explosive yield of 23 kilotonnes is slightly greater than that of the Hiroshima bomb, but several hundred times smaller than that of the infamous “Castle Bravo” test there in 1954 – the largest US nuclear explosion in history.



# START OF NEGOTIATIONS

In one of its final acts of 2016, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a landmark resolution to begin negotiations on a treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons. This historic decision heralds an end to two decades of paralysis in multilateral nuclear disarmament efforts.

Nuclear weapons are the only weapons of mass destruction not yet prohibited in a comprehensive and universal manner, despite their well-documented catastrophic humanitarian and environmental impacts.

Biological weapons, chemical weapons, anti-personnel landmines and cluster munitions have

all been explicitly and completely banned under international law, whereas only partial prohibitions exist for nuclear weapons.

The new treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons will strengthen the global norms against using and possessing these weapons. And it will spur long-overdue progress towards disarmament.

Eliminating the nuclear threat has been high on the UN agenda since the organization's formation in 1945. But international efforts to advance this goal have stalled in recent years, with nuclear-armed nations investing heavily in the build-up and modernization of

their nuclear arsenals. More than 20 years have passed since multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations last took place.

## UNACCEPTABLE WEAPONS

The risks of nuclear weapon use are real and increasing. There are roughly 14,900 nuclear weapons in the world today, mostly in the arsenals of just two nations: the United States and Russia. Seven other nations possess them: the United Kingdom, France, China, Israel, India, Pakistan and North Korea.

The successful conclusion of the UN negotiations in 2017 to outlaw nuclear weapons is not contingent

upon the support and participation of these nations. No nation will have the power to veto the treaty's adoption.

The vast majority of UN member states believe that weapons intended to inflict catastrophic humanitarian harm should, as a matter of principle, be prohibited under international law. They have concluded that nuclear weapons must now be placed on the same legal footing as other weapons of mass destruction.

Experience shows that the prohibition of a particular type of weapon provides a solid legal and political foundation for advancing its progressive elimination.

# OUR CAMPAIGN

The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) is a coalition of non-governmental organizations in one hundred countries advocating for a strong and effective treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons. Our partners range from local peace groups to global federations representing millions of people.

ICAN was initiated in Melbourne, Australia, in 2007 and launched internationally in Vienna, Austria. Our campaign's founders were inspired by the tremendous success of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, which a decade earlier had played an instrumental role

in the negotiation of the anti-personnel mine ban treaty.

Since our founding, we have worked to build a powerful global groundswell of public support for the abolition of nuclear weapons. By engaging diverse groups and working alongside the Red Cross and like-minded governments, we have reframed the debate on nuclear weapons and generated momentum for the start of treaty negotiations.

## **HUMANITARIAN FOCUS**

At a review of the Non-Proliferation Treaty in 2010, all nations expressed their deep concern at the “catastrophic humanitarian

consequences” of any use of nuclear weapons – a collective statement that led to the convening of three major conferences in 2013 and 2014 focusing on the humanitarian impact of nuclear detonations.

ICAN served as the civil society coordinator for these meetings, which brought together most of the world's governments, along with international organizations and academic institutions.

In 2015 we helped garner the support of 127 nations for a diplomatic pledge “to fill the legal gap” in the existing regime governing nuclear weapons. Based on the outcomes of the

humanitarian conferences, we also campaigned for the establishment of a special UN working group to examine specific proposals for advancing nuclear disarmament. This body met in Geneva in February, May and August 2016. It issued a landmark report recommending that negotiations begin in 2017 on a treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons once and for all.

Our campaign then lobbied successfully for the UN General Assembly to adopt the resolution in December 2016 to launch negotiations on “a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons”.

## HOW WE WORK

ICAN coordinates global days of action, raises public awareness, and engages in advocacy at the UN and in national parliaments. We work with survivors of nuclear testing and the US atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, helping share their testimonies with the public and decision makers.

Many prominent people have lent their support to ICAN, including Nobel laureates Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama, musician Herbie Hancock, artist Yoko Ono, and actors Martin Sheen and Michael Douglas. The UN secretary-general has praised ICAN's work.

An ICAN forum in Oslo in 2013 ahead of the first conference on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons.







### SUMITERU TANIGUCHI

As a 16-year-old boy, **Sumiteru Taniguchi** (left) was riding his bicycle in Nagasaki when a US atomic bomb exploded 1.8 km away, scorching his back and leaving the skin on his right arm hanging down from the shoulder to the fingertips. His horrific burns have required 17 operations. He is pictured here alongside a photo of himself not long after the attack.

### IROJI KEBENLI

**Iroji Kebenli** (right), of the Marshall Islands, suffered burns to his skin in 1954 after contact with “Bikini snow” – radioactive ash and coral fragments dispersed over Bikini atoll and other islands following US nuclear tests. Still today, many Marshallese people remain displaced from their home islands due to radioactive contamination.



# CATASTROPHIC HARM

Nuclear weapons are the most destructive, inhumane and indiscriminate weapons ever created. Both in the scale of the devastation they cause and in their uniquely persistent, spreading, genetically damaging radioactive fallout, they are unlike any other weapons.

A single nuclear weapon detonated over a populated area could kill hundreds of thousands or millions of people. The use of a large number of nuclear weapons would disrupt the global climate, causing widespread agricultural collapse and famine. The burning cities ignited by nuclear explosions would loft smoke high into

the upper atmosphere, blanketing the globe. This, in turn, would cool, darken and dry the Earth's surface, decimating food crops – putting potentially billions of people at risk of starvation.

As the first conference on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons, in Oslo in 2013, found: “The effects of a nuclear weapon detonation ... will not be constrained by national borders, and will affect states and people in significant ways, regionally as well as globally.”

Nuclear weapons have been used twice in warfare – on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. Close to a quarter of a million civilians were

incinerated in an instant or suffered agonizing deaths in the weeks and months after the attacks. Many thousands more have died in the seven decades since from radiation-related illnesses.

More than 2,000 nuclear weapons have also been exploded in tests, with devastating consequences.

## EFFECTS OF A BOMBING

Nuclear weapons release vast amounts of energy in the form of blast, heat and radiation. Almost everything close to ground zero is vaporized. Ionizing radiation at high doses kills cells, damages organs and can be acutely fatal. At all doses, it

increases the lifetime risk of cancer, chronic disease and genetic damage. Children (especially girls) and women are more susceptible than men to radiation harm.

The UN, Red Cross and other relief agencies have declared that no adequate humanitarian response would be possible following a single nuclear detonation, let alone in the event of all-out nuclear war. At the third humanitarian conference, in Vienna in 2014, the Red Cross warned nuclear weapons “can only bring us to a catastrophic and irreversible scenario that no one wishes and to which no one can respond in any meaningful way”.

# PROCESS SO FAR

## MAY 2010 NON-PROLIFERATION TREATY REVIEW CONFERENCE



In the final document adopted by consensus at the Non-Proliferation Treaty review conference in 2010, parties to the treaty express their “deep concern at the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons”. This gives impetus to future statements and conferences on the subject.

## NOVEMBER 2011 RED CROSS RESOLUTION



The international Red Cross and Red Crescent movement – the largest humanitarian organization in the world – adopts a landmark resolution appealing to all nations to negotiate a “legally binding international agreement” to prohibit and completely eliminate nuclear weapons. Nuclear disarmament becomes a top Red Cross priority.

## MAY 2012 FIRST HUMANITARIAN STATEMENT



On behalf of 16 nations, Switzerland delivers the first in a series of joint statements on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons, urging all nations to “intensify their efforts to outlaw nuclear weapons”. Support for this humanitarian call grows with each new statement. Eventually, 159 nations – four-fifths of all UN members – sign on.

## MARCH 2013 OSLO CONFERENCE



Eager to strengthen the evidence base for prohibiting and eliminating nuclear weapons, Norway hosts the first-ever intergovernmental conference on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons, attended by 128 nations. Relief agencies warn they would be powerless to respond meaningfully in the aftermath of a nuclear attack.



**FEBRUARY 2014**  
**NAYARIT**  
**CONFERENCE**



Mexico hosts the second humanitarian consequences conference, in Nayarit, with 146 nations present. The chair calls for the launch of a “diplomatic process” to negotiate a “legally binding instrument” to prohibit nuclear weapons – a necessary precondition, he says, for reaching the goal of elimination. He declares the conference “a point of no return”.

**DECEMBER 2014**  
**VIENNA**  
**CONFERENCE**



A record 158 nations participate in the third conference on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons, in Vienna, which concludes with a pledge to cooperate in efforts to “fill the legal gap” in the international regime governing nuclear weapons. Within months, 127 nations formally endorse the document, known as the Humanitarian Pledge.

**AUGUST 2016**  
**UN WORKING GROUP**  
**IN GENEVA**



A special UN working group on nuclear disarmament meets in Geneva in February, May and August 2016 to discuss new legal measures to achieve a nuclear-weapon-free world. It recommends the negotiation of a treaty to prohibit nuclear weapons – a decision that the Red Cross hails as having “potentially historic implications”.

**DECEMBER 2016**  
**GENERAL ASSEMBLY**  
**RESOLUTION**



The United Nations General Assembly adopts a landmark resolution to convene a conference in 2017 to negotiate “a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination”. The decision heralds an end to two decades of paralysis in multilateral nuclear disarmament efforts.

# NUCLEAR FORCES IN 2017

Nine nations together possess an estimated 14,900 nuclear weapons, of which more than 90 per cent are in the arsenals of the United States and Russia. Several hundred US and Russian warheads are kept on high alert – ready to be launched within minutes of a warning.

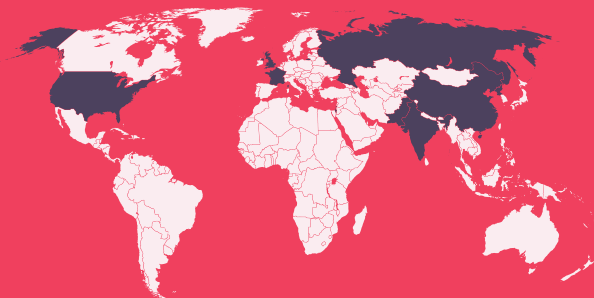
Most nuclear weapons today are many times more powerful than the atomic bombs dropped on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945.

The failure of the nuclear-armed nations to disarm has heightened the risk that other nations will one day acquire nuclear weapons. The only guarantee against the spread

and use of nuclear weapons is to prohibit and eliminate them without delay.

Although the leaders of some nuclear-armed nations have expressed their vision for a nuclear-weapon-free world, all are actively upgrading and modernizing their nuclear arsenals. They have made no plans as yet to dismantle them completely.

Five European nations host US nuclear weapons on their soil as part of a NATO nuclear-sharing arrangement (Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey), and roughly two dozen other nations claim to rely on US nuclear weapons in their military doctrines.



COUNTRY	WARHEADS	TESTS
United States	6,800	1,054
Russia	7,000	715
United Kingdom	215	45
France	300	210
China	260	45
India	110–120	6
Pakistan	120–130	6
Israel	80	?
North Korea	<10	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>14,900</b>	<b>2,086</b>

*Source: Federation of American Scientists, 2017*

ICAN activists in Melbourne, Australia,  
filming a campaign video in 2014.



# WHY A BAN

Both other types of weapons of mass destruction – chemical and biological weapons – have long been prohibited under international law. The vast majority of the world's nations believe that it is now high time for nuclear weapons, the most destructive weapons of all, to be similarly banned. A new law is needed to prohibit all activities related to nuclear weapons – for all nations, under all circumstances.

History shows that the prohibition of certain weapon systems facilitates progress towards their elimination. Weapons that are outlawed are increasingly seen as illegitimate, losing their

political status and, along with it, the resources for their production, modernization and retention. Arms companies find it more difficult to acquire resources for work on illegal weapons, and such work carries a great reputational risk.

The treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons will complement existing bans on other indiscriminate and inhumane weapons, and reinforce existing legal instruments on nuclear weapons, such as the Non-Proliferation Treaty, regional nuclear-weapon-free zones, and the treaty banning nuclear test explosions. It will strengthen the global

taboo against the use and possession of nuclear weapons – challenging any notion that these are legitimate, acceptable weapons for certain nations.

Underpinning the decision by governments and civil society to pursue a ban treaty is our belief that changing the rules regarding nuclear weapons will have a major impact beyond those nations that may formally adopt the treaty at the outset. This belief stems from experience with treaties banning other weapons, which have established powerful norms that influence the policies and practices even of states that are not parties.

## EVERYONE'S SECURITY

The new treaty will aim not only to advance nuclear disarmament, but also to help prevent further proliferation. It will enhance the security of people everywhere, not least of all those in nations currently armed with nuclear weapons, who are more likely than others to be the victims of a nuclear attack.

The three conferences on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons in 2013 and 2014 shed new light on the perils of living in a world armed to the brink with nuclear weapons. They clarified the urgent need to prohibit these weapons under international law.





# TREATY ELEMENTS

Our campaign is calling for the negotiation of a non-discriminatory international legal instrument that prohibits its parties, their nationals and any other individual subject to its jurisdiction from engaging in activities such as the development, production, testing, acquisition, stockpiling, transfer, deployment, use and threat of use of nuclear weapons. The treaty should also prohibit its parties from assisting, financing, encouraging and inducing others to carry out any of these prohibited acts.

It should provide an obligation for the complete elimination of nuclear

weapons and a framework to achieve it. It would not need to establish specific provisions for elimination, but parties could agree to relevant measures and timelines as part of the implementation process – through protocols or other appropriate legal instruments.

The treaty should also include positive obligations for parties, such as fulfilling the rights of victims and survivors of nuclear weapon activities, requiring actions to address damage to affected environments, and providing for international cooperation and assistance to meet the obligations of the instrument.

ICAN campaigners in Nayarit, Mexico, in 2014  
for the second humanitarian conference.







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A DONATION TO HELP US  
ABOLISH NUCLEAR WEAPONS  
– BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE.**

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**“THE WRITING SHOULD BE ON THE WALL FOR THE  
NUCLEAR POWERS. A TREATY BANNING NUCLEAR  
WEAPONS IS ON ITS WAY. THE MOMENTUM OF  
THIS CAMPAIGN IS UNSTOPPABLE.”**

**– DESMOND TUTU, NOBEL PEACE PRIZE WINNER**

