Chair, distinguished delegates,

The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) applauds the 14 states that last month signed, ratified or acceded to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. And we warmly welcome the announcements by several others of their intention to become parties in the near future.

These states are responding to the dire warnings, issued time and again by doctors, the Red Cross, UN agencies and hibakusha, of the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of the use of nuclear weapons, and the growing risk of such use.

Instead of simply hoping that a nuclear calamity will never again occur, they are working to prevent it. They are also working to address the ongoing harm from past nuclear use and testing through the treaty’s provisions on victim assistance, environmental remediation, and international cooperation and assistance.

Achieving the prompt entry into force of the TPNW must be a top priority. Each new ratification will strengthen the global norm against the worst weapons of mass destruction. Each new ratification will take us one step closer to our goal of eliminating nuclear weapons completely and forever.

We urge all states that have not yet done so to join this treaty without delay, and all states to vote “yes” on the new First Committee resolution supporting it.

Significant progress has already been made towards entry into force. The pace of ratification has exceeded that of other WMD treaties. But the pace should be faster still, given the magnitude of the threat that we face and the urgency of action.

As the UN Secretary-General remarked last month, the deterioration of the global security environment has made progress in nuclear disarmament more difficult, yet also more important.

The prevailing security environment, of course, is no excuse for inaction. It certainly is no justification for the development of new nuclear warheads or the modernization of old ones. All states must pursue nuclear disarmament, unconditionally.

Distinguished delegates,
When the vast majority of the world’s nations set out to negotiate the TPNW last year, they did so with the determination to establish powerful new norms. They wanted to move states beyond long-held positions. And they understood very well that the treaty would be contentious.

But no treaty has ever enjoyed universal support at the outset. It is always built up over time. Monumental strides forward in human history do not begin with everyone happily agreeing on a common course of action.

Even if the treaty does not bind the nuclear-armed states initially, we are confident that it will have a profound impact on their behaviour. Norms do matter – as the nuclear-armed states know. This is why they are discouraging others from joining.

It is time for those that claim protection from an ally’s nuclear weapons to step forward and show leadership. It is time to rethink old doctrines.

As legal scholars have pointed out, there is nothing in the TPNW that would prevent a state party from remaining allied to a nuclear-armed state, so long as that party in no way assists or encourages the nuclear-armed state to retain its nuclear forces.

Let us be clear: No circumstances can ever justify the use of even a single nuclear weapon. No circumstances can ever justify the wilful violation of the core principles of international humanitarian or human rights law.

Distinguished delegates,

Today, no nation claims protection from a chemical or biological weapon umbrella. No nation boasts of being a chemical or biological weapon state. The strong international norms against those weapons make such claims taboo.

Just as we would react with revulsion and outrage at any government claiming the right to use chemical or biological weapons, we must react with revulsion and outrage at any government claiming the right to use nuclear weapons.

The mere contemplation of such action, including on another state’s behalf, is – to put it plainly – abhorrent, gruesome and barbaric.

Those who are today resisting the TPNW will perhaps, in years to come, look back with shame and embarrassment and regret at having stood on the wrong side of history. Some may even pretend that they had been supporters all along.

We thank those states that have had the courage and moral conviction to lead the way in the struggle to eliminate these most immoral weapons.

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