Background
An estimated 13,890 nuclear weapons still exist in the world today\(^1\), despite repeated calls over many years from the vast majority of UN member states for such weapons to be eliminated. Their continued existence poses grave implications for human survival, the environment, socioeconomic development, the global economy, food security, and the health of current and future generations.

Nuclear weapons have been used twice in warfare, by the United States government against the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. Those two attacks claimed more than a quarter of a million lives. Nuclear weapons have also been detonated in tests more than 2,000 times since the dawn of the atomic age, with devastating long-term consequences for human health and the environment.

Any use of nuclear weapons would violate international humanitarian law, environmental law, and human rights law. Out of deep concern at the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons, 122 states voted on 7 July 2017 to adopt the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)—a landmark disarmament agreement that comprehensively outlaws the most destructive instruments of war ever created and establishes a pathway to their total abolition.

The Treaty prohibits the development, production, possession, use, and threatened use of nuclear weapons, as well as assistance with or encouragement of such activities. In addition, the Treaty obligates states parties to provide for the needs of nuclear weapon victims and to work towards environmental remediation areas contaminated by nuclear weapon detonations.

The TPNW builds upon and strengthens the norms established by the 1968 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the regional treaties creating nuclear-weapon-free zones, and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, as well as the biological and chemical weapons conventions and other prohibitions of weapons that cause unacceptable harm.

The TPNW opened for signature on 20 September 2017 and, of early September 2019, has 70 signatories and 26 parties. A further 24 states must either ratify or accede to the TPNW to trigger its entry into force. The Treaty will enter into force as binding international law 90 days thereafter. A first meeting of the states parties will then be convened within a year of the TPNW’s entry into force.

Current context
All nine nuclear-armed states, instead of pursuing nuclear disarmament as they are obligated
to do, are investing heavily in the so-called modernisation of their nuclear arsenals and related infrastructure. Some are developing and testing new nuclear-capable missiles and new types of warheads.

In addition, five European states continue to host US nuclear weapons on their territories, and around 30 states claim “protection” from an ally’s nuclear weapons. These states are complicit in perpetuating nuclear dangers.

In many situations, tensions among nuclear-armed states appear to be at a historic high. Veiled or explicit threats to use nuclear weapons have become increasingly common. The security of all other states, particularly neighbouring states, is diminished as a result of the behaviour of these few states.

Certain nuclear arms control agreements have come under threat or been abandoned. For instance, the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty ceased operation in August 2019 following the United States’ withdrawal, and the fate of the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or “Iran nuclear deal”, is highly uncertain.

Against this current, the TPNW has established a powerful non-nuclear norm. It has placed nuclear weapons on the same legal footing as other weapons of mass destruction, thereby challenging the pervasive notion that certain states are entitled to wield such weapons.

The TPNW has already begun to impact on behaviour and policies even in states that have not yet adhered to it. For instance, major financial institutions in two states that claim protection from nuclear weapons have indicated their intention to exclude nuclear weapon-producing companies from their investment portfolios.

City councils—including in Berlin, Hiroshima, Los Angeles, Oslo, Paris, Sydney, Toronto, and Washington DC—have added to the normative weight of the TPNW by endorsing the Treaty and urging their respective national governments to join it.

Each state that signs and ratifies the TPNW will contribute to its early entry into force and increase its wider impact in global nuclear politics, including by delegitimising the role of weapons of mass destruction in security policies.

Recommendations

During First Committee, delegations should:
- Express strong support for the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and, if they have not yet signed and ratified it, declare their intention to do so;
- Highlight and condemn as illegitimate any ongoing activities that are prohibited under this Treaty, such as threats to use nuclear weapons, testing of nuclear weapons, and the development and modernisation of nuclear arsenals; and
- Call for all resolutions on nuclear weapons to include a reference to the TPNW.

Beyond First Committee, states should:
- Sign and ratify the TPNW and work to ensure its quick entry into force, including by encouraging other states to join it;
- Adopt national legislation and other measures to implement the Treaty, including by ending investments in nuclear weapon-producing companies;
- Designate a focal point within the government to assess the needs and plan implementation of victim assistance and environmental remediation efforts;
• Reject nuclear weapons as legitimate weapons and work to end any military activities related to the development and use of nuclear weapons; and;
• Encourage, bilaterally and multilaterally, all states to join the broad international consensus against weapons of mass destruction and for nuclear-armed states to eliminate their nuclear weapons in accordance with the TPNW

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