ICAN Statement

UN Open-ended Working Group on Nuclear Disarmament

Elements for a treaty banning nuclear weapons

Delivered by Celine Nahory  
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Thank you for allowing me to take the floor. The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons is a coalition of 440 organizations in 98 countries working to achieve a treaty banning nuclear weapons. I speak on behalf of Peace Boat. The international community cannot afford to delay any longer the prohibition of a weapon that is plainly unacceptable on humanitarian grounds.

As we have seen with biological weapons, chemical weapons, landmines and cluster munitions, the act of prohibition stimulates and accelerates progress towards elimination. Weapons that have been outlawed increasingly become seen as illegitimate. They lose their political status and, along with it, the money and resources for their production, proliferation and perpetuation.

At the February session of this working group, states discussed a number of possible legal measures for advancing nuclear disarmament, with the idea of a “nuclear weapon ban treaty” emerging as the most feasible, most widely supported option for moving forward. Already at this second session, we have again heard many strong calls to begin negotiations on a ban treaty.

Such a treaty can – and must – be negotiated now, even without the participation of nuclear-armed states. It will constitute an important initial step towards elimination. It need not include complex provisions relating to the destruction of nuclear stockpiles. Such provisions can be negotiated subsequently, in the form of protocols, once nuclear-armed states are willing to engage.

The treaty should prohibit not only the use and threat of use of nuclear weapons, but also their development, production, testing, acquisition, stockpiling, transfer and deployment, as well as assistance, financing, encouragement and inducement of these acts. It should seek to close all loopholes in the existing regime governing nuclear weapons, including loopholes that allow certain states in this room to claim protection from an ally’s nuclear weapons.
We encourage this working group to discuss how the treaty should address fissile materials, delivery vehicles, the financing of nuclear weapon programmes, and non-explosive forms of nuclear testing. It should also discuss how the treaty could address the rights of victims and the impact of nuclear detonations on the environment.

A nuclear weapon ban treaty will strengthen the global norm against the use and possession of nuclear weapons. It will clarify that, in the view of the international community, nuclear weapons are unacceptable. It will be a tool with which parliamentarians, the media, non-governmental organizations and the general public can exert pressure on their governments to end reliance on nuclear weapons in their military doctrines.

Through prohibitions on the financing of nuclear weapons or their transit through the territory of a state party, the treaty will make it more difficult for states to retain and modernize their nuclear arsenals. More than any other proposal on the table, it has the potential to break through the decades-long logjam in disarmament negotiations, fundamentally altering the political dynamics and opening up new opportunities for progress.

ICAN warmly welcomes the various proposals submitted to this working group for the start of negotiations on a legally binding instrument prohibiting nuclear weapons. We are confident that there is now a critical mass of support to ensure that such negotiations are successful. We look forward to working alongside you at the first negotiating conference.