Statement of the International Campaign to
Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) to the
Non-Proliferation Treaty Preparatory Committee

Geneva, 25 April 2018

Delivered by Ms. Isabella Vargas

Chair, Distinguished delegates,

In 2010, the States parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty agreed, by consensus, to pursue policies that are fully compatible with the objective of achieving a world without nuclear weapons.

Yet, today the modernization of nuclear arsenals, including the manufacture of new warheads and their delivery systems, continues unabated. Nuclear weapons remain deployed on foreign soil, and no steps have been taken towards ending reliance on the so-called “nuclear umbrella”. We have seen a broadening of doctrines for contemplated nuclear use, and have heard explicit threats of radioactive destruction.

How is this compatible with the objective of achieving a world without nuclear weapons? How is it compatible with the NPT?

All such policies and practices pose a threat to the entire non-proliferation and disarmament regime, and indeed to our very survival. They are incompatible with a rules-based international order, with basic principles of the United Nations, and with the dictates of public conscience.

These policies and practices are a source of great division and disharmony in the international community, and we condemn them unreservedly. We condemn them because nuclear weapons are indiscriminate, inhumane and illegal.

When will the modernization programmes end? When will the fallacy of the nuclear umbrella be dispensed with? When will genuine disarmament begin?

Of course, the vast majority of States parties do take their obligations under the NPT seriously. They have responded with urgency to the conclusions of the three conferences on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons. They have worked to enhance the security of their citizens and of humanity as a whole.

Last July, 122 States voted to adopt the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons – an “effective measure” as required by Article VI of the NPT. In the words
of the UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, this was a “historic accomplishment”.

The treaty fills a major gap in international law. It powerfully challenges the notion that nuclear weapons are legitimate instruments of war. And it establishes a legal framework for their total elimination.

We applaud those States that have signed and ratified the treaty, and we urge all others to follow their lead. This is the new international legal standard. Each new signature and ratification is a small but important step towards a world forever free of the worst weapons of terror.

Distinguished delegates,

In this time of great global instability, we must not lower our expectations for action on disarmament. The deterioration of the international security environment must rather impel us to act with greater ambition and urgency.

Do not accept weak outcomes. Do not accept yet more broken promises. Do not confuse consensus with progress. Heed the calls of the survivors of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Respond to the dire warnings of the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of the use of nuclear weapons.

Too often, those who claim to seek “common ground” are simply promoting outcomes of the lowest common denominator – outcomes that fall well short of the expectations of the majority. Yes, we must “build bridges” – but only so as to allow those who daily threaten the mass incineration of civilians to cross over to the side of those who reject nuclear weapons completely.

Finally, we welcome with cautious optimism the recent diplomatic moves towards peace on the Korean Peninsula. Dialogue and disarmament provide the only pathway forward. Nuclear weapons will only ever be a source of great insecurity. There can be no right hands for inhumane, illegal weapons.

Thank you.