

Joint submission of
the International Committee of the Red Cross and New Zealand Red Cross
to the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee's International Treaty
Examination of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

Who we are

The International Red Cross Red Crescent Movement (Movement) is a neutral, independent and impartial humanitarian network that operates worldwide in accordance with internationally recognised Statutes and Regulations. It consists of three components: the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC); the 191 National Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies (including the New Zealand Red Cross); and the International Federation of Red Cross Red Crescent Societies.

ICRC

The ICRC's mandate, which stems from the 1949 Geneva Conventions, is to protect and assist people affected by armed conflict and other situations of violence. The ICRC also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening international humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles.

New Zealand Red Cross

New Zealand Red Cross is a member of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and has been operating in New Zealand for more than a century. Our programmes include domestic disaster response, deploying international aid workers, providing resettlement services for quota refugees, supporting community strengthening activities and delivering first aid courses for young people and adults. We have over 14,000 member volunteers and 500 staff who deliver these programmes throughout the country.

Introduction

The ICRC and the NZRC commend New Zealand for the instrumental role that it played in the negotiation of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons ("the Treaty") and for signing the Treaty on 20 September 2018. We now urge the government to take the steps necessary to ratify the Treaty as soon as possible, thereby contributing to early entry into force of the Treaty and progress towards a nuclear weapon free world.

Consequences of nuclear use

This submission is rooted in what the ICRC learned through its own experience as it, and the Japanese Red Cross, attempted to assist the victims of the atomic bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. From this experience and from what has been learned since then through a range of expert studies and three international conferences on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons held in 2013 and 2014, it is clear that:

- Any use of nuclear weapons today would have severe catastrophic humanitarian, environmental and societal consequences.
- There would be massive civilian casualties and victims would continue to suffer and die in the months and years following the detonation as a result of radiation poisoning, cancers and other diseases.
- Indeed, the health impacts of nuclear weapons can last for decades. Even today, Japanese Red Cross hospitals continue to treat thousands of patients for cancers and leukaemia attributable to radiation from the 1945 atomic blasts.
- There is no international capacity or plan in place to adequately assist the victims of a nuclear attack.
- The humanitarian consequences of a nuclear-weapon detonation would not be limited to the country where it occurs but would impact neighbouring countries and their populations. And even a limited nuclear exchange would have global repercussions.

In light of these realities, the only sound course of action is prevention. Nuclear weapons must never be used again and must be prohibited and eliminated.

The importance of ratifying the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement welcomed the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons on 7 July 2017. It was an historic development and an essential step towards a future free of nuclear weapons. Although the Treaty will not make nuclear weapons disappear overnight, it delegitimizes their role in the world today and provides a disincentive for their proliferation. By signing and ratifying the Treaty, a State is sending a clear signal that such weapons are unacceptable.

An Increased risk of use

Action by every State is essential as the risk of use of nuclear weapons seems to be increasing. With previous restraints steadily falling away, and threats of use of nuclear weapons entering mainstream politics, we see a shift from a focus on non-use and elimination to making the use of nuclear weapons possible or more likely. In addition, military incidents involving nuclear States and their allies are occurring with disturbing frequency and States possessing nuclear weapons have plans for adapting nuclear weapons in ways that will make them able to be used in a wider variety of contexts. In parallel, their command and control systems have become more vulnerable to cyber-attacks. Experts have expressed concern that the danger of use of nuclear weapons may be greater today than during the cold war.

Influence in the Pacific and globally

- Ratifying the Treaty would enhance New Zealand's long history and commitment to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. It would build upon its efforts to promote and ensure implementation of disarmament instruments (e.g. Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty) and the enactment of the *New Zealand Nuclear Free Zone, Disarmament, and Arms Control Act 1987*. It

would also allow New Zealand to be one of the first 50 States to ratify, the number required for the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons to enter into force, which would permit it to play a key role in the first Meeting of States Parties. At this meeting, important decisions will be taken which will influence the operation of the Treaty for years to come.

- Given that the issue of nuclear weapons is an important one for many Pacific States, ratification also presents an opportunity for New Zealand to strengthen relationships in the region and demonstrate solidarity and support with its neighbours. Like the Arms Trade Treaty, where New Zealand has provided tailored assistance to Pacific Island States to advance adherence and implementation of the ATT, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons could provide an additional avenue for similar regional cooperation.
- New Zealand's ratification would be a significant step towards the entry into force of the Treaty. Currently, there are 10 State Parties, Palau being the only Pacific State that has joined thus far.

Recommendation

Too often, the international community has been unable to prevent foreseeable crises. Given what is known about the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons and the growing risk of their use, it is imperative that States take action to advance nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation so as to prevent a future nuclear calamity. To this end, the ICRC and the NZRC recommend that New Zealand move quickly to ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Contacts

New Zealand Red Cross

Dr. Rebecca Dudley

International Humanitarian Law Advisor

69 Molesworth Street, Thorndon, Wellington

Tel +64 4 474 1506 Mob: +64 27 203 4694

International Committee of the Red Cross

Georgia Hinds

Regional Legal Adviser

15 National Circuit Barton, ACT Australia 2604

Tel: +61 2 6273 2968 Mob: +61 419 218 231