

Nuclear ban treaty adopted: New Zealand plays a leading role

8 July 2017

“New Zealand brings to this negotiation our long and proud history as a strong supporter of nuclear disarmament, as a member of our regional Nuclear Weapon Free Zone (the 1985 Treaty of Rarotonga), and on the basis of our guiding domestic legislation – the New Zealand Nuclear Free Zone, Disarmament and Arms Control Act, 1987. We look forward to playing an active and constructive part in this negotiation alongside all colleagues here - including our valued civil society partners who have made such a strong contribution to our work to date.” - New Zealand statement to the first negotiation session of the UN Conference to Negotiate a Legally Binding Instrument to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons, 28 March 2017

Almost 72 years since the day of the first atomic bomb detonation, a legally binding nuclear ban treaty with the potential to end the threat of global devastation on an unimaginable scale has finally been achieved.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons was adopted last night by 122 states during the final session of the UN Conference to Negotiate a Legally Binding Instrument to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons, Leading Towards their Total Elimination, in New York.

As the vote to adopt the Treaty text approached, the President of the UN Conference, Ambassador Elayne Whyte Gomez (Costa Rica), stressed the importance of putting an international legal norm in place as a first step towards achieving a nuclear weapons-free world, and described the Treaty as “a historic event for humanity”.

New Zealand was a Vice President of the UN Conference and played a leading role in building support for a ban treaty, with the MFAT disarmament team working tirelessly over the past five years as the humanitarian disarmament initiative to ban nuclear weapons gathered momentum to achieve this long awaited and crucial goal - its potential to end the threat of nuclear destruction is a gift for future generations.

The Treaty bans the development, testing, production, manufacture, possession, transfer, use or threat of use, deployment, installation or stationing of nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices, as well as assistance, encouragement or inducement of any of these prohibited activities. It provides a pathway for nuclear-armed states to join the Treaty and destroy their nuclear weapons in a time-bound, verifiable and irreversible manner.

The Treaty recognizes the ethical imperatives for nuclear disarmament, the urgency of achieving a nuclear weapon-free world, and the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons. It acknowledges the unacceptable suffering of the atomic bomb and nuclear test survivors, and the disproportionate impact that nuclear weapons and related activities have on indigenous peoples, women and girls.

The Treaty contains provisions for assistance to those affected by nuclear weapons testing and use, as well as for environmental remediation of areas affected by nuclear weapons testing and use - a welcome development for the Pacific, a region that has been irreparably harmed by more than 350 full scale nuclear weapon detonations conducted by Britain, France and the USA since 1 July 1946.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons will open for signature on 20 September 2017, and we anticipate that New Zealand will be one of the first states to sign and ratify it. The Treaty will enter into force 90 days after the 50th ratification.

Links:

- Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons - <http://www.icanw.org.nz>
- 'Nuclear ban treaty adopted: New Zealand plays a leading role', iCAN Aotearoa New Zealand, 8 July 2017 - On Facebook, <https://web.facebook.com/notes/peace-movement-aotearoa/nuclear-ban-treaty-adopted-new-zealand-plays-a-leading-role/1398632223517476> - Formatted for printing, <http://www.icanw.org.nz>
- 'UN conference adopts treaty banning nuclear weapons', UN News, 7 July 2017 - <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=57139#.WWAEN6bzIZU>
- "'Historic" treaty on banning nuclear weapons adopted at UN', United Nations Radio, 7 July 2017 - <http://www.unmultimedia.org/radio/english/2017/07/historic-treaty-on-banning-nuclear-weapons-adopted-at-un>
- Press briefing by Ambassador Elayne Whyte Gomez (Costa Rica), President of the United Nations Conference to Negotiate a Legally Binding Instrument to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons, Leading towards Their Total Elimination - 7 July 2017, <http://webtv.un.org/watch/elayne-whyte-g%C3%B3mez-costa-rica-on-the-treaty-on-prohibition-of-nuclear-weapons-press-conference-7-july-2017/5496371703001> and 6 July 2017, <http://webtv.un.org/watch/elayne-whyte-g%C3%B3mez-costa-rica-on-the-treaty-on-prohibition-of-nuclear-weapons-press-conference-6-july-2017/5494629499001>