

Nuclear weapons ban treaty – APLN statement

We the undersigned APLN members welcome the **Draft Convention on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons** submitted by the president of the UN conference tasked with negotiating this treaty (A/CONF.229/2017/CRP.1, 22 May 2017). We believe the draft marks an important milestone in the long campaign to ban the most indiscriminately inhumane weapons ever invented. Rooted in humanitarian principles, the draft text provides a good basis to complete negotiation of a treaty to prohibit unequivocally the acquisition, development, production, manufacture, possession, testing, transfer, extra-territorial stationing and use of nuclear weapons as major steps towards their eventual elimination.

While nuclear weapons exist, especially in the large numbers we still have today, there is an ongoing danger of nuclear war, whether by intention, accident, or rogue or terrorist action. These ban negotiations are a consequence of the strong concerns held by most countries that progress in nuclear arms reductions has stalled and the nuclear-weapon states are not taking seriously their obligation under the NPT to pursue *and bring to a conclusion* negotiations on nuclear disarmament.

Concerns about the attitude of the nuclear weapon states are reinforced by the fact these countries and their allies, including regrettably several countries in the Asia Pacific region, are boycotting the ban negotiations. Participation in the negotiations would provide an opportunity for these countries to explain their position, set out their intentions for meeting their disarmament obligations and the practical considerations to be taken into account, and to influence the treaty text. Participation by the nuclear-armed countries outside the NPT would be an opportunity for these countries to demonstrate willingness to affirm global nuclear norms of non-proliferation, non-use and no testing, and further to accept disarmament obligations similar to those of the NPT nuclear-weapon states.

Amongst the reasons given for not participating, the nuclear weapon states argued a ban treaty was unrealistic, would detract from practical step-by-step disarmament efforts, and would damage the NPT. We do not accept these arguments:

- A time-bound commitment to disarm would be unrealistic in today's circumstances, but the draft treaty does not propose this (see draft Article 5). Rather, each country with nuclear weapons may submit disarmament proposals to a conference of parties under the ban treaty. It is up to each such country to decide what processes and timing it proposes.
- The credibility of the argument that the ban treaty would detract from practical step-by-step disarmament efforts is undermined by the fact that the nuclear-armed countries have no such steps under way or even under discussion. We encourage the nuclear-armed countries to initiate negotiations on these steps without further delay leading to some tangible deliverables.
- The ban treaty does not damage the NPT. Around two-thirds of NPT States Parties are participating in the ban negotiations. It is the boycott by a minority of parties that is divisive. Far from damaging the NPT, the ban treaty will help advance its objectives that all States Parties have committed to for almost half a century.

The nuclear-weapon states seem to have forgotten that the NPT requires them to pursue negotiations on disarmament in good faith. By delegitimizing nuclear weapons the ban treaty will reaffirm the normative boundary between nuclear and conventional weapons, and undercut the attitude that nuclear weapons are permanent. The treaty should make these countries reconsider their plans for new nuclear weapon systems and “modernization” programs, and to start to look seriously at how these weapons can be reduced and eliminated.



For this reason we call upon all countries to support the aims of the ban treaty. Those that can join at the outset should do so, and those that currently have nuclear weapons should start developing proposals for the further effective measures on nuclear disarmament called for in Article 5 of the draft treaty.

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