



## ASIA-PACIFIC LEADERSHIP NETWORK

FOR NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION AND DISARMAMENT

### A UNITED VOICE AGAINST NUCLEAR WEAPONS

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14 March 2025

At the beginning of 2025, a staggering 9,604 nuclear weapons were available for use globally – a number that continues to rise.

“This upward trajectory is expected to continue as countries modernise and, in some cases, expand their arsenals, unless there is a breakthrough in arms control and disarmament efforts,” [said](#) Hans M Kristensen of the Federation of American Scientists at the launch of the latest edition of the *Nuclear Weapons Ban Monitor* last week.

In many respects, the outlook is bleak: the nuclear arms race is continuing apace, disarmament talks are non-existent, and the norm against the use of nuclear weapons is eroding.

If we continue down this path, a nuclear catastrophe – perhaps orders of magnitude deadlier than the US atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki eight decades ago, which claimed a quarter of a million lives – is all but inevitable. As John F Kennedy famously [warned](#) in 1961, “The weapons of war must be abolished before they abolish us.”

It is clear that our time is running out.

Amid increasing nuclear dangers, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) is more important than ever. Adopted in 2017 and in force since 2021, it now has exactly half of the world’s countries [on board](#) as signatories or states parties. Last week, they met at the UN headquarters in New York for the third time to discuss the treaty’s implementation.

At the meeting’s conclusion, they adopted a powerful [declaration](#) rejecting the continued expansion of nuclear arsenals, dangerous nuclear rhetoric (which we hear every day now in [Europe](#) and [beyond](#)), and the flawed theory of “nuclear deterrence.” They also reaffirmed their “unwavering determination to address the existential threat that nuclear weapons pose to humanity.”

Too many people have become resigned to the view that nuclear weapons are a permanent fixture in our world. We must never accept that idea. Nuclear weapons were built with human hands, and they can be dismantled with human hands.

This is not a utopian dream. The fact that large geographic regions have been declared free of such weapons suggests that the entire world could one day follow suit. TPNW parties are leading us in that direction.

It is especially significant that the country presiding over last week's meeting, [Kazakhstan](#), once had more than 1,400 nuclear weapons on its territory and relinquished them all. [South Africa](#), which will take up the reins for the next meeting to be held in 2026, has also shown that disarmament is possible by dismantling its nuclear arsenal developed during the Apartheid era.

There are no technical barriers to eliminating nuclear weapons, only political ones. With leadership and resolve, progress could be achieved very rapidly.

In challenging times like these, we might be inclined to lower our expectations, to temper our demands. But the higher the stakes, the more ambitious we must be. Indeed, historically, some of the greatest breakthroughs in the field of disarmament have emerged out of situations of crisis.

Our focus must remain on elimination, not simply extending the period of non-use of nuclear weapons, and we must insist that elimination be pursued not as a distant dream, but an urgent necessity.

TPNW meetings allow the nuclear-weapon-free majority to speak with one voice in denouncing actions that threaten our very survival as a species. They also serve as a gathering place for the global peace and nuclear disarmament movement.

More than one thousand representatives of civil society from 163 organisations participated in last week's meeting. Of these organisations, 44 engaged with the TPNW process for the first time. Twenty-two parliamentarians from 13 countries – 12 of which have yet to join the treaty – were also present, and pledged to continue working to bring their respective countries on board this crucial treaty.

Throughout the week, we held more than 60 [events](#) covering a wide range of topics, from the role of [art](#) in the anti-nuclear movement to [divestment](#) from the nuclear arms industry to the impact of nuclear weapons on [children](#).

Many events were also organised by and for people from communities around the world harmed by nuclear weapons. These included *hibakusha* from Japan and South Korea, as well as test survivors from Australia, Kazakhstan, Kiribati, Ma'ohi Nui, the Marshall Islands, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Eight decades after the first nuclear test in New Mexico and the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the world is at a crossroads: either we continue down the path of increasing confrontation, militarisation, and proliferation – which is a one-way downward spiral to annihilation – or we choose the path of dialogue, diplomacy, and disarmament, and thereby create a future that respects the Earth and each other.

The TPNW is the path that most of the world is choosing to be on.

*The opinions articulated above represent the views of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Asia-Pacific Leadership Network or any of its members.*

*This commentary is also published on the [APLN website](#).*

## **ABOUT APLN**

The **Asia-Pacific Leadership Network for Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament (APLN)** is a Seoul-based organization and network of political, military, diplomatic leaders, and experts from across the Asia-Pacific region, working to address global security challenges, with a particular focus on reducing and eliminating nuclear weapons risks. The mission of APLN is to inform and stimulate debate, influence action, and propose policy recommendations designed to address regional security threats, with an emphasis on nuclear and other WMD (weapon of mass destruction) threats, and to do everything possible to achieve a world in which nuclear weapons and other WMDs are contained, diminished, and eventually eliminated.



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