



## **Convincing Nuclear-armed Countries to Take the Path to Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons**

### **Background: Entry Into Force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons-- When the Rubber Meets the Road**

More than 120 nations have, over the last few years, promoted a nuclear weapon ban treaty as a key milestone on the road to total elimination of nuclear weapons. Negotiations to make this treaty a reality began March 27–31, 2017, at the United Nations headquarters in New York. As a prelude, the Humanitarian Impact Initiative had been growing since 2013, which saw the first Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons conference, held in Oslo. This was followed by conferences in Nayarit, Mexico, and Vienna in 2014. The conferences heightened demand for concrete steps to reduce nuclear dangers. The conversation moved to Geneva, where a UN Open Ended Working Group (OEWG) recommended that the General Assembly convene negotiations for a “Legally Binding Instrument to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons, Leading Towards their Total Elimination.” In October 2016, the UN First Committee on disarmament voted 123 to 38 (16 abstaining) to adopt this recommendation, followed by another overwhelmingly favorable vote of 113 to 35 (13 abstaining) in the General Assembly in December, 2016. All nine of the nuclear-armed countries boycotted the entire OEWG process, though their wishes often surfaced in the statements and votes of nations “who include nuclear weapons in their security policies”—in other words, the so-called “nuclear umbrella” countries such as Japan, South Korea and NATO countries like Canada and Germany.

On July 7, 2017, despite intense opposition by the nuclear-armed countries, the international movement to draw the world’s attention to the humanitarian impacts of nuclear weapons culminated in a historic vote to categorically ban the most lethal class of weapons of mass destruction. 122 nations voted to adopt the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). Later that year, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), the chief civil-society backer of the TPNW. Three years later, on October 24, 2020, United Nations Day, Honduras became the 50th, paving the way for the treaty to officially enter into force on January 22, 2021. Yet, nuclear-armed countries are still steadfastly opposed to the TPNW.

With the upcoming entry into force of this treaty, an important question arises: what strategy can we, American civil society groups, adopt to leverage the TPNW to steer the U.S. and the other nuclear-armed states towards total elimination of nuclear weapons? To answer this question, Physicians for Social Responsibility has conducted a series of interviews with Canadian and American disarmament experts to garner advice to guide our strategy. In particular, we sought ideas for shorter-term objectives which, when combined, would steer nuclear-armed states towards our goal.

Here are the top 5 ideas that came out of our interviews with these experts: (1) convince the U.S. government to follow the positive obligations of the TPNW: environmental remediation and victim assistance; (2) promote the universality of the TPNW; (3) highlight the incompatibility between sustainability and nuclear weapons; (4) redirect nuclear weapons spending where it is needed the most; and (5), focus on the current successes of the TPNW and exploit them. These ideas will be further discussed below.

### **1. Convince the US government to follow the positive obligations of the TPNW: Environmental remediation and victim assistance**

Firstly, following the successes of previous humanitarian disarmament instruments, multiple disarmament experts believe that the U.S. government should commit to the positive obligations of TPNW Article 6 and Article 7, even without being party to the TPNW<sup>1</sup>. Article 6 includes an obligation that States parties must “take necessary and appropriate measures<sup>2</sup>” to ensure environment remediation and victim assistance, which is the central humanitarian part of the TPNW. Article 7 of the TPNW asks states parties, to “provide technical, material and financial assistance to States Parties affected by nuclear weapons use or testing, to further the implementation of this Treaty<sup>3</sup>” but also to provide assistance for the victims of these actions.

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Erin Hunt

<sup>2</sup> *Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons*, Article 6, A/CONF.229/2017/8. Retrieved December 2, 2020, from <https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/nuclear/tpnw/>

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 7.

According to Erin Hunt, Program Manager at Mines Action Canada, obtaining commitment to such obligations “have worked in past prohibition treaties like the Mines Ban Treaty (MBT) and it could definitely work once again with the Nuclear Ban Treaty<sup>4</sup>”. For example, in a paper about the significance of the entry into force of the TPNW, ICAN explained that even though the U.S. has not signed the Mine Ban Treaty, “the United States is one of the top five donors to support the implementation of MBT obligations, including landmine clearance and victim assistance<sup>5</sup>.”

In addition to directly asking the U.S. government to follow the TPNW’s positive obligations, civil society groups could prompt the U.S. government to do by so attracting donor engagement to these humanitarian implications of nuclear weapons, as seen previously in the campaigns of the MBT and the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM)<sup>6</sup>. As pointed out by Matthew Bolton, Director of the International Disarmament Institute at Pace University, mine actions professionals believe that “contacts established through working on mine action funding has often made officials in states not party more sympathetic to the norms of the MBT and CCM<sup>7</sup>.”

## **2. Promote the universality of the TPNW**

Secondly, another way to encourage international cooperation and commitment from nuclear-armed states to the TPNW’s norms would be to promote the universality of the TPNW, in accordance with Article 12. This article claims that, once the TPNW enters into force, State Parties “shall encourage States not party to this Treaty to sign, ratify, accept, approve or accede to the Treaty, with the goal of universal adherence of all States to the Treaty<sup>8</sup>.”

ICAN Aotearoa New Zealand, an ICAN partner organization in New Zealand, has expressed that “achieving universality (Article 12), is a matter of policy rather than legislation<sup>9</sup>” and that the government of New Zealand’s position on the TPNW indicates

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with Erin Hunt.

<sup>5</sup> ICAN. (2020). *The Significance of the Entry Into Force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons*. <https://www.psr.org/blog/some-good-news-for-a-change-nearly-50-ratifications-for-the-nuclear-ban-treaty/>

<sup>6</sup> Bolton, M. (2017). Humanitarian and Environmental Action to Address Nuclear Harm. *Pace University’s International Disarmament Institute*, p. 22.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons*, Article 12, A/CONF.229/2017/8. Retrieved December 2, 2020, from <https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/nuclear/tpnw/>

<sup>9</sup> ICAN Aotearoa New Zealand. (2018, May 30). *Key points for submissions on Nuclear Weapons Treaty*. Scoop. [https://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/PO1805/S00471/key-points-for-submissions-on-nuclear-weapons-treaty.htm?fbclid=IwAR1gEBDldl8nlXWWyXvY\\_y81xRphOUSiO\\_H9io9K52BdEuLkrhoM1oZ6bQI](https://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/PO1805/S00471/key-points-for-submissions-on-nuclear-weapons-treaty.htm?fbclid=IwAR1gEBDldl8nlXWWyXvY_y81xRphOUSiO_H9io9K52BdEuLkrhoM1oZ6bQI)

that Ban treaty champions like New Zealand will ensure that this requirement is met once entry into force happens<sup>10</sup>.

In a *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* article, Princeton scholar Zia Mian mentioned that there could be “Article 12 summits<sup>11</sup>” between diplomats from nuclear ban states, civil society groups like ICAN and its international partners, as well as new organizations and States not party that might be interested in joining the discussions. This expanded coalition and the holding of universal summits on the TPNW would give the humanitarian disarmament community the opportunity to “present unified demands—at the UN General Assembly and in other international forums.<sup>12</sup>” He believes such actions could direct the attention of the public and the nuclear-armed states, resulting in a global support for the TPNW<sup>13</sup>.

When asked about this universal summit idea, Earl Turcotte, veteran Canadian diplomat and Chair of the Canadian Network to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, said that the UN First Committee would be the ideal forum to hold a universal dialogue between ban treaty states, civil society groups and also States non-party<sup>14</sup>. From there, it could be decided what form the next summits should take and when they should happen.

As for Paul Meyer, former Canadian Ambassador for Disarmament, Senior Fellow with The Simons Foundation and Fellow in International Security at Simon Fraser University, he believes that “ensuring partnerships between politicians, civil society, nuclear weapon states are essential” to make the TPNW truly universal<sup>15</sup>.

### **3. Highlight the incompatibility between sustainability and nuclear weapons**

Thirdly, some experts believe the American public and government would be more interested in joining the TPNW if the nuclear weapons issues were presented in an intersectional way; if people were informed about the humanitarian implications of nuclear weapons. Indeed, many people are unaware that nuclear weapons, detonated or not, cause widespread harm to health and the environment<sup>16</sup>. For example, physicians from International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) and other health focused international organizations have demonstrated that the mining of uranium is toxic for our environment and our health and that a nuclear war would disrupt the global

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Mian, Z. (2017, July 7). After the nuclear weapons ban treaty: A new disarmament politics. *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*. <https://thebulletin.org/2017/07/after-the-nuclear-weapons-ban-treaty-a-new-disarmament-politics/>

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Earl Turcotte

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Paul Meyer

<sup>16</sup> IPPNW. (n.d.). *Banning Nuclear Weapons: The Humanitarian Facts*. An IPPNW Campaign Kit. Retrieved December 2, 2020, from <https://hinwcampaignkit.org/>

climate<sup>17</sup>. This thought is shared by IPPNW interviewees Dr. Ira Helfand, Dr. Mary-Wynne Ashford and Dr. Jonathan Down, who have been educating the public for years about the disastrous risks that a nuclear war represents for humanity<sup>18</sup>.

Erin Hunt believes that nuclear weapons proliferation should be viewed not only as a threat to health and security, but more as a threat to sustainable development in general<sup>19</sup>. She goes on to say that nuclear deterrence is “completely incompatible with sustainable development goals (SDGs)<sup>20</sup> and feminist foreign policy<sup>21</sup>”. According to Hunt, using this narrative would not only appeal to younger generations to join the TPNW movement, but also serve as a counter-argument to liberal and progressive nations that promote sustainability while possessing nuclear weapons in the name of deterrence<sup>22</sup>.

Even though the U.S. government is not formally committed to the UN SDGs, the U.S. has demonstrated leadership in a lot of them, including climate action<sup>23</sup>. With an incoming Biden administration, we might see more openness to disarmament efforts from the U.S. government to join multilateral disarmament treaties or, at least, to recognize the importance of the TPNW<sup>24</sup>.

In the run-up to the election, Joe Biden’s presidential campaign stated that “he will not only recommit the United States to the Paris Agreement on climate change – he will go much further than that. [...] He will fully integrate climate change into our foreign policy and national security strategies, as well as our approach to trade<sup>25</sup>.” According to some interviewees, with a President-elect interested in multilateralism, intersectionality and sustainability, civil society groups should highlight how the U.S. current opposition to the TPNW is an obstacle to its sustainable development goals<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Dr. Ira Helfand; Interview with Dr. Mary-Wynne Ashford; Interview with Jonathan Down

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Erin Hunt

<sup>20</sup> The sustainable development goals (SDGs) are the United Nations objectives to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. They address the global challenges we face, including poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace and justice. Learn more about SDGs here: United Nations. (n.d.). Take Action for the Sustainable Development Goals. *United Nations Sustainable Development*. Retrieved December 2, 2020, from <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Erin Hunt

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Pipa, A. F., & Brown, K. (2019, October 14). *American leadership on the Sustainable Development Goals*. Brookings. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2019/10/14/american-leadership-on-the-sustainable-development-goals/>

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Earl Turcotte

<sup>25</sup> Biden, J. (n.d.). *Plan for Climate Change and Environmental Justice*. Joe Biden for President: Official Campaign Website. Retrieved December 2, 2020, from <https://joebiden.com/climate-plan/>

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Erin Hunt; Interview with Earl Turcotte

#### **4. Redirect nuclear weapons spending where it is needed the most**

Fourthly, in its report “Enough is Enough: Global Nuclear Weapons Spending 2020”, ICAN mentioned that the United States has spent \$35.4 billion in its nuclear arsenal in 2019, which represents almost 50% of the global nuclear weapons spending in 2019. Yet, many disarmament experts think this spending is “not useful, expensive and is getting away from helpful spending<sup>27</sup>”.

In 2020, as a way to bring light on the need to redirect the nuclear weapons spending where it is needed the most, many disarmament experts have used COVID-19 to demonstrate how American tax-payers money goes towards nuclear weapons instead of funding masks and health professionals’ salaries<sup>28</sup>. For example, in an interview about the TPNW on the podcast *Press the Button*, Beatrice Fihn, Director of ICAN, said:

We are really aiming to shift public opinion with this treaty in the U.S. -- to use it as a tool to question investments in nuclear weapons, the government spending on nuclear weapons. I think we have a huge opportunity now with the current health crisis to really re-evaluate what national security is -- and not just with the corona crisis, but also with the Black Lives Matter campaign<sup>29</sup>.

Erin Hunt thinks that civil society groups could benefit from wider support if they proposed to redirect nuclear weapons spending to other defense needs. For example, in addition to saying that this money should go towards health needs (e.g. the “masks not missiles” and “healthcare not warfare” narrative), civil society groups should consider advocating to redirect these funds towards training officers, maintaining Navy hospitals or providing for any defense need which does not conflict with sustainability<sup>30</sup>.

This opinion is similar to that of Laicie Heeley, Fellow with Stimson's Budgeting for Foreign Affairs and Defense program, who wrote: “investing in long-term American security must ultimately include careful consideration of the trade-offs between a 1 trillion-dollar nuclear modernization program and more relevant conventional defense needs.”<sup>31</sup>

#### **5. Focus on the current successes of the TPNW and exploit them**

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with Erin Hunt

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Fihn, B. (2020, October 7). *Banning the Bomb*. Press the Button. <https://soundcloud.com/user-954653529/banning-the-bomb>

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Erin Hunt

<sup>31</sup> Blechman, B., & Heeley, L. (2016, October 27). Blechman, Heeley Analysis: UN Anticipated To Take Step Toward Banning Nuclear Weapons. *Stimson Center*. <https://www.stimson.org/2016/blechman-heeley-analysis-un-anticipated-take-step-toward-banning-nuclear-weapons/>

Finally, an idea that cropped up in every interview that we have done for this research is that we must learn from our successes in order to further stigmatize the nuclear-armed states. As Steven Staples, Founder and Vice-President of the Rideau Institute, said, the stigmatization of nuclear-armed states is important because it illustrates the gap between the actions of policy-makers and the will of the citizens. Later in the interview, he added that “if something works, we have to keep doing it”<sup>32</sup>.

According to Zia Mian, this means civil society groups must keep working in collaboration with ICAN and their allies, but moreover they “must be willing to continue to be bold and take political risks, as [they] did in getting the treaty<sup>33</sup>”. Concretely, for Dr. Mary-Wynne Ashford, this means not only celebrating publicly the entry into force of the TPNW on January 22, 2021, but also highlighting the successes we are already seeing now that the TPNW has passed the ratification threshold<sup>34</sup>.

One of the current successes that Dr. Ashford mentioned in her interview was the divestment of nuclear weapons. Indeed, superannuation funds have already started divesting from nuclear weapons and this should accelerate once entry into force happens<sup>35</sup>. Nuclear weapons are now considered “controversial weapons<sup>36</sup>”, which should be a strong argument to stigmatize banks and states that keep investing in nuclear weapons. This argument could also be used against American post-secondary schools investing in the production of nuclear weapons<sup>37</sup>.

Education-wise, the importance of focusing on the successes of the TPNW is that it gives hope for younger generations to join the disarmament movement. As Mary-Wynne Ashford wrote in her *Commentary on Teaching about the Treaty to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons to Three Generations*, the challenge of education about nuclear weapons is “to build hope while balancing the reality that nuclear weapons remain the greatest threat to

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<sup>32</sup> Interview with Steven Staples

<sup>33</sup> Mian, Z. (2017, July 7). After the nuclear weapons ban treaty: A new disarmament politics. *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*. <https://thebulletin.org/2017/07/after-the-nuclear-weapons-ban-treaty-a-new-disarmament-politics/>

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Mary-Wynne Ashford

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Beavis, M. (2020, November 1). Disarmament treaty drops bomb on super funds investing in nuclear weapons. *Michael West*. <https://www.michaelwest.com.au/disarmament-treaty-drops-bomb-on-super-funds-investing-in-nuclear-weapons/>

<sup>37</sup> ICAN. (2019, November). *Schools of Mass Destruction: American Universities in the U.S. Nuclear Weapons Complex*. ICAN. [https://www.icanw.org/schools\\_of\\_mass\\_destruction](https://www.icanw.org/schools_of_mass_destruction)

public health in the world today<sup>38</sup>”. Just like Beatrice Fihn, she believes that presenting the TPNW as a success inspires young people to join the disarmament movement<sup>39</sup>.

### About the author



*Jérémy Cotton will graduate with Honors from University of Quebec in Montreal in April 2021 with a BA in International Relations and International Law. He wrote this paper while interning remotely with PSR’s Nuclear Weapons Abolition program from August, 2020, to December, 2020. Mr. Cotton is an Associate Member of the Canadian Pugwash Group (national affiliate of Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs), where he provides scholarly insights into the prevention and resolution of armed conflict, including disarmament, control of the arms trade, the peaceful settlement of disputes and contributes to solutions for environmental threats to human security.*

### List of interviewees -- Jérémy Cotton, October - November 2020

**Earl Turcotte**, Veteran Canadian Diplomat and Arms Control Specialist & Chair of the Canadian Network to Abolish Nuclear Weapons

**Erica Frank, MD, MPH**, Professor and Canada Research Chair at University of British Columbia, Founder and President at nextGenU.org, Principal Investigator at Healthy Doc = Healthy Patient & Research Director, Annenberg Physician Training Program

**Erin Hunt**, Program Manager at Mines Action Canada

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<sup>38</sup> Ashford, M.-W., & Down, J. (2018). Teaching about the Treaty to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons to three generations. *Medicine, Conflict and Survival*, 34(4), p. 263.

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with Dr. Mary-Wynne; Robinson, T. (2017, September 7). *Beatrice Fihn, ICAN: Either you’re OK with mass murdering civilians with nuclear weapons or you’re not. Why would we build bridges to that?* *Presenza*. <https://www.presenza.com/2017/09/beatrice-fihn-ican-either-youre-ok-mass-murdering-civilians-nuclear-weapons-youre-not-build-bridges/>

**Ira Helfand**, MD, Co-President of IPPNW, Co-chair of PSR's Nuclear Weapons Abolition Committee, Member of ICAN's International Steering Committee  
**Jonathan Down**, MD, President of IPPNW Canada, Member of PSR Committee for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons & Member of the Steering Committee of Canadian Network for Abolition of Nuclear Weapons  
**Mary-Wynne Ashford**, MD, PhD, Former Co-President of IPPNW, Author & Board Member of IPPNW Canada  
**Paul Meyer**, Chair of the Canadian Pugwash Group & Adjunct Professor of International Studies and Fellow in International Security, Simon Fraser University  
**Steven Staples**, President of Public Response & Founder and Vice-President of the Rideau Institute

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