

The Slow March Toward a World Without Nuclear Weapons

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Theme: [Militarization and WMD](#)

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A little over a year ago, 122 countries – nearly two-thirds of the world’s total – made history by adopting the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). Between 20 September 2017 and 3 August 2018, 60 of those countries took it a step further by signing the treaty. On 31 July 2018, New Zealand became the 14th country to take the final step by ratifying it. With no deadline for signing and ratifying the treaty, it will become part of international law when 50 countries have ratified it.

Countries opposed to the treaty include all nine countries with nuclear weapons and all 29 members of NATO. That the treaty is viewed as [controversial](#) in some circles should come as no surprise, but it is worth noting that the treaty has overwhelming support from countries in Africa, Central America, and South America. It is also supported by all of the countries in the Middle East (including Iran) except for Syria, Turkey, and Israel. Syria participated in treaty negotiations but was absent for the vote to adopt on 7 July 2017. Turkey, along with four other NATO-member countries (Germany, Italy, Belgium, and the Netherlands), allows the presence of U.S. nuclear weapons as part of a “nuclear sharing” agreement. Israel has its own arsenal of nuclear weapons and has never signed the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). The NPT was originally adopted in 1968 and includes 190 countries. Palestine is among the 14 countries that have ratified the TPNW.

In 2017, a letter from [over 3,000 scientists](#) worldwide in support of the nuclear weapons ban treaty was delivered to the U.N. General Assembly during negotiations to adopt the treaty. The letter begins:

“Nuclear arms are the only weapons of mass destruction not yet prohibited by an international convention, even though they are the most destructive and indiscriminate weapons ever created. We scientists bear a special responsibility for nuclear weapons, since it was scientists who invented them and discovered that their effects are even more horrific than first thought.”

Will the treaty, once it is ratified by 50 countries, guarantee a world free of nuclear weapons? No, but it will be a tremendously important step toward that goal. A September 2017 [article](#) from Human Rights Watch explains:

“Countries that have not signed the nuclear weapons ban treaty will, with time, face an uphill struggle in opposing the treaty. As with landmines and cluster

munitions, one can expect that they will eventually be faced with a weapon so stigmatized that they will have no excuse but to give it up.”

Nuclear weapons aren’t the only threat to life on Earth, but they are the most unpredictable. The very existence of nuclear weapons is a constant threat to the incredibly complex web that makes life on Earth possible. Full ratification of the treaty cannot come too soon. The website for [Physicians for Social Responsibility](#) includes this:

“Without the treaty, the nuclear-armed countries’ dangerous arms race has no end in sight.”

The treaty addresses victim assistance and nuclear contamination, as summarized by the [International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons](#):

“Nations are obliged to provide assistance to all victims of the use and testing of nuclear weapons and to take measures for the remediation of contaminated environments.”

For anyone who argues that destroying the thousands of existing nuclear weapons would be prohibitively expensive, consider this from [Global Zero](#):

“... maintaining vast arsenals of mass destruction – at a staggering cost of \$1 trillion per decade globally – makes no sense, strategically or financially. Nuclear weapons undermine global stability.”

You can follow the progress of the treaty [here](#). **Setsuko Thurlow**, who survived the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima in 1945, spoke at the U.N. in 2017 on the day that the nuclear weapons ban treaty was adopted. You can listen to her speech [here](#).

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***Jerry Merriman** is a writer with a strong interest in peace and justice issues.*

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