

The Treaty for Banning Nuclear Weapons. “Nuclear Weapons are Not Only Immoral but Illegal”

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We are “on the cusp of a truly historic moment,” said the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) on Thursday morning, “when the international community declares, unambiguously, for the first time, that nuclear weapons are not only immoral, but also illegal.”

The development—and hopeful adoption—of this treaty represents a breaking point with the status quo, with subservience to the powerful, with the patriarchal world order of massive nuclear violence. Whatever happens on Friday, this treaty has already impacted the nuclear establishment and, more broadly, international relations. Its adoption and implementation will bring even more positive change.

This treaty prohibits the policies and practices that sustain nuclear weapons, including those related to nuclear “deterrence”. Whatever is not explicitly prohibited in its provisions is implicitly prohibited through the spirit of this treaty. It outlaws all aspects of nuclear weapon activities, from development to use and everything in between. As ICAN, as well as many states on Wednesday said,

“The absence of explicit references to [certain activities] in no way implies that they are lawful. This ban is comprehensive.”

This is important in a world where governments that support the continued existence of nuclear weapons are actively investing in their modernisation and maintenance. Just this week, a review commissioned by the German parliament [determined](#) that “the country could legally finance the British or French nuclear weapons programs in exchange for their protection.” It is exactly this type of activity that the nuclear weapon ban treaty will help prevent. As the New York Times notes, this plan “would face steep public opposition and diplomatic hurdles.” After tomorrow, it will (if the ban is adopted) also be in contention with international law.

Thus the nuclear weapon ban treaty will help prevent future risks to humanity, as **Vanessa Griffen** of FemLINKpacific said to the conference. It will also “address the damage caused by past development of these weapons through nuclear testing,” she said, noting that the treaty contains “vital provisions for the people, land, and oceans that have borne the brunt of nuclear testing.” This treaty was borne out of the recognition that the humanitarian and environmental impacts of nuclear weapons are catastrophic. This provided the motivation for governments around the world to finally break the taboo against pursuing new international law on this issue without the support of the nine countries that possess nuclear

weapons. It was a daring move, supported and inspired by the courage of civil society actors and parliamentarians that wanted to challenge the status quo and take real action to create a better future.

This treaty will affect even those states that did not participate in these negotiations. Nuclear-armed and nuclear-alliance states may not have been in the room, but they will now be challenged by the new reality this treaty is creating. Their legacy of radioactive violence will be confronted with a future of vibrant political, legal, economic, and social opposition. **Senator Scott Ludlam** from the Australian Green Party said he and other parliamentarians and civil society representatives from all of the nuclear-armed and nuclear-alliance states commit to “make our way home and campaign for our governments to recognise that this treaty is the best chance we have to build a truly secure world free of nuclear weapons. One by one,” he said, “we will bring them into the room.”

On Friday, as they decide whether to adopt this treaty, states have a choice to make. Are they for nuclear weapons or against them? Do they think it is legitimate for a handful of heavily militarised countries to be able to commit instant genocide? These questions have, over the years, been drained of their stark vibrancy, black and white muddled to grey. This was deliberate. Concepts like nuclear deterrence replaced the horrors of burning flesh, flattened buildings, and generations of cancers. The ban treaty brings everything back into focus. What kind of world do we want to live in? What kind of world do we want to actively build, against the interests of the structures of power that rely on violence, intimidation, fear, and hate to sustain themselves?

“Simply banning nuclear weapons is not simple at all,” said Senator Ludlam.

It has taken decades of activism, years of discussions and strategising, and months of complex negotiations. Now we are here, with a simple question on the table and majority of committed states standing around it. For or against?

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