

The NPT 40 years on: time to step up efforts for nuclear abolition

NEW YORK – Tomorrow marks the 40th anniversary of the entry into force of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). With 189 countries signed up, it is one of the most widely ratified treaties in the world. The treaty forbids parties from acquiring nuclear weapons and imposes an obligation on the five original nuclear-weapon parties – the US, Russia, the UK, France and China – to disarm.

“Forty years after the Non-Proliferation Treaty came into force, nuclear weapons and the means to produce them are still spreading and the promise of disarmament is unfulfilled,” said Tim Wright, a spokesperson from the UN office of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN). “Proliferation remains a major concern, and there are still more than 23,000 nuclear weapons in the world, many of them on hair-trigger alert. Clearly governments need to get serious about fulfilling their obligations.”

ICAN advocates negotiation of a nuclear weapons convention – a legally binding, verifiable treaty banning the development, possession and use of nuclear weapons, and establishing the mechanisms needed to bring about their elimination. “There is growing political support for a nuclear abolition treaty to implement the NPT’s promise of a nuclear-weapon-free world. Such a treaty will be needed – as treaties have been negotiated to ban dum dum bullets, chemical and biological weapons, landmines and cluster munitions. It is actually the most practical option,” said Wright.

This May parties to the NPT will meet in New York for a five-yearly conference to review all aspects of the treaty. “This is an ideal opportunity for governments to set the wheels in motion for a nuclear abolition treaty. The longer these weapons exist in the arsenal of any nation, proliferation is inevitable and the greater the risk that they will be used again, with catastrophic consequences,” he said. “Governments cannot wait another 40 years before finally doing away with the worst instruments of terror.”