

## **UN Secretary-General backs ICAN initiative to outlaw nuclear weapons**

HIROSHIMA – United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has written to a group of high school students in Hiroshima, Japan, expressing his support for their project to send 1000 hand-folded paper cranes – a Japanese symbol for nuclear disarmament – to every president and prime minister worldwide. More than 190,000 cranes have been distributed as part of the students’ appeal, which is sponsored by the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN).

“This project deserves recognition and support from advocates of nuclear disarmament throughout the world,” Mr Ban wrote in his letter to ICAN. “It features a noble goal: to promote the negotiation of a nuclear weapons convention.” He saluted ICAN – in particular, ICAN’s youth campaigners in Hiroshima – for “working with such commitment and creativity in pursuit of our shared goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world”. In return for their gift of 1000 cranes, the students are seeking messages of support from all leaders for a treaty to outlaw and eliminate nuclear weapons.

“Ancient Japanese tradition holds that anyone who folds 1000 paper cranes will be granted a wish. My wish is that the dream of a nuclear-weapon-free world will become a reality in time to benefit those who folded these cranes,” wrote the Secretary-General, who has called for a global ban on nuclear weapons as part of his 2008 disarmament action plan. The paper cranes are “much more than a symbol”, he wrote in his letter; “they are a call to action”.

The Hiroshima students have enlisted the help of ICAN campaigners in over 80 countries to deliver the cranes in their capital cities. Activists from Finland, Switzerland and Seychelles have held meetings with their presidents to hand over the cranes and explain the urgent need for united global action to ban nuclear weapons. Messages of support for the initiative have started to flow in from other world leaders, including the presidents of Slovenia, Kazakhstan, Greece and Vanuatu.

### **The atomic bombings**

The United States military dropped atomic bombs on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. More than 210,000 people died by the end of 1945 from the heat, blast and radiation effects of the two explosions. Many thousands more have died in the decades since from radiation-related illnesses. Today there are approximately 19,000 nuclear weapons in the arsenals of nine countries, despite their well-known catastrophic humanitarian and environmental effects.

The students’ appeal to world leaders was sent on 6 August 2012 – the 67th anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. It states: “We are deeply concerned that our future is still being threatened by close to 20,000 nuclear weapons ... We

fear that unless governments and individuals do more to rid the world of these horrible weapons, another city might one day suffer the same fate as our own. As youth peace ambassadors, we feel we must do everything in our power to keep that from happening – which is why we are seeking your support.”

Sorata Watanabe, 17, who is one of the leaders of the project, thanked Mr Ban for his message of support: “We are enormously grateful that the UN Secretary-General has endorsed our paper crane project. This means a lot to us. His letter will help us secure messages of support from other world leaders. We want to remind people everywhere of the catastrophic effects of nuclear weapons. Their very existence constitutes a humanitarian problem that requires an urgent solution – a ban.”

### **Towards Oslo 2013**

ICAN is a global movement calling for a treaty to outlaw and eliminate nuclear weapons. It has partner organizations in over 60 countries, and was founded in 2007 by the Nobel Peace Prize-winning International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War. The Norwegian government has invited ICAN to be the civil society partner at a conference in Oslo in March 2013 examining the immediate and long-term effects of nuclear weapons, and the inability to provide adequate medical relief.

ICAN Australia Director Tim Wright, who has helped the Hiroshima students to coordinate the paper crane project, said: “We hope that the students’ initiative will build public and political support around the world for a ban on nuclear weapons. We are urging all governments to attend the meeting in Oslo in 2013 on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons, and make this the catalyst for negotiations on a treaty to outlaw and eliminate nuclear weapons completely.”

### **Media contacts:**

Tim Wright (Melbourne)  
Email: [tim@icanw.org](mailto:tim@icanw.org)  
Phone: +61 (0)400 967 233

Daniela Varano (Geneva)  
Email: [daniela@icanw.org](mailto:daniela@icanw.org)  
Phone: +41 787 262 645