

MEDIA RELEASE

26 September 2013



Stigmatize, ban and eliminate: a new vision for nuclear disarmament

For immediate release

NEW YORK: The first ever high-level meeting on nuclear disarmament concluded its work today in New York City. The meeting - convened by the United Nations General Assembly - puts the issue of nuclear weapons once again at the top of the global agenda. The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) welcomed the ever stronger focus by states on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons and the growing calls to ban them.

Despite resistance from nuclear-armed states, a growing number of states and international organisations compelled by the undeniable evidence of the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons and concerned about the limited progress of nuclear disarmament, recognised the imperative to address the global humanitarian threat of nuclear weapons, with bold and urgent actions toward prohibition. The conference on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons held in Oslo in March and the second conference on this topic to be held by Mexico in February 2014, were welcomed by many during the debate.

The President of Austria, H. E. Mr. Heinz Fischer, in his statement to the UNGA outlined a clear path towards abolition: Stigmatize, ban and eliminate, noting that prohibition of nuclear weapons could come before their elimination. Similar statements delivered today by a wide range of non-nuclear weapon states show that a shift in the nuclear weapons debate is taking centre stage, a shift that focuses on humanitarian arguments rather than security doctrines and power politics. The debate was a further sign that non-nuclear weapon states are gaining in confidence as they reclaim ownership of a debate that has previously been controlled by nuclear weapons possessors.

Today the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) reaffirmed their commitment to negotiations on a legally binding instrument banning nuclear weapons.

Building on this momentum, the Foreign Minister of Mexico announced that a follow-up conference to continue the discussion around the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons would be held next February in Nayarit.

“The key points of this debate have been the growing prominence of the discourse on humanitarian impact and the enthusiasm about the Oslo conference last March and the forthcoming Mexico conference in February. This debate strengthens our confidence and resolve that there is a credible way before us towards outlawing nuclear weapons,” says Beatrice Fihn, member of ICAN’s International Steering group, “For the first time, non-nuclear weapon states are taking the lead, without asking nuclear weapon possessors for permission. We must not let states that

possess weapons of mass destruction dictate to the rest of the world that these weapons are somehow acceptable for a select few.”

Despite this renewed momentum, nuclear possessing states like the United States, France and the United Kingdom, in a defensively worded statement, regretted that “energy is being directed” towards initiatives outside their preferred path, which has proved inefficient to bring about nuclear disarmament and prevent nuclear proliferation over the last 50 years.

The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) – a campaign coalition with more than 300 members in 80 countries – who participated to the High Level Meeting and delivered a statement on behalf of civil society, welcomes non-nuclear weapons states taking the initiative to drive a new discourse around the global humanitarian threat posed by nuclear weapons, a discourse that can only conclude with the decision to make these weapons illegal, once and for all.

“By keeping the focus on their humanitarian impact, we acknowledge that nuclear weapons are weapons – not tools of power” says Beatrice Fihn, “No security doctrine or theory can obscure the fact that any use of nuclear weapons would entail catastrophic humanitarian consequences – massive civilian casualties and irreparable damage to the environment, public health and the world economy.”

A single nuclear weapon detonation in an urban area would kill hundreds of thousands immediately and leave hundreds of thousands more in desperate need. A wider use of nuclear weapons could cause climatic changes that would impair global crop production and lead to a mass famine among the world’s most vulnerable populations. Study upon study has pointed to the inability to prevent or care for civilian casualties on a mass scale. Mitigation is simply impossible.

The one demand around which an ever-growing number of governments and NGOs are coalescing is a ban on nuclear weapons, along the same lines as the prohibitions on chemical and biological weapons.

“History shows how the world has been on the verge of a nuclear catastrophe several times. The possession of nuclear weapons is a global humanitarian threat and the only sensible way to prevent a detonation from happening is by negotiating an international legal instrument that provides the framework for their elimination,” says Nosizwe Lise Baqwa who delivered a statement by civil society at the High Level meeting.

Joseph Gerson of American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) also spoke on behalf of civil society, emphasising the continuing failure of nuclear-armed states to fulfil their responsibilities to disarm and setting out a number of steps they should take in this regard.

Interviews

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About ICAN

The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) is a global campaign coalition working to mobilize people in all countries to inspire, persuade and pressure their governments to initiate negotiations for a treaty banning nuclear weapons. It has 300 partner organizations in 80 countries, and was launched in 2007. Prominent supporters include Desmond Tutu, Yoko Ono and the Dalai Lama.

Details available at: <http://www.icanw.org>

Resources

For information about the effects of nuclear weapons see:

- **Unspeakable Suffering** (2013)
Download at: <http://www.icanw.org/resources/publications>
- **Banning Nuclear Weapons (2013)**
Download at: <http://www.article36.org/cat2-nuclear-weapons/banning-nuclear-weapons-2/>
- **Catastrophic Humanitarian Harm** (2012)
Download at: <http://www.icanw.org/resources/publications>