

## ACTION ALERT 17-5: NUCLEAR WEAPONS BAN TREATY

*As Quakers, we seek a world without war. We seek a sustainable and just community. We have a vision of an Australia that upholds human rights and builds peace internationally, with particular focus on our region. In our approach to government we will promote the importance of dialogue, of listening and of seeking that of God in every person. We aim to work for justice and to take away the occasion for war.*

July 2017

*On 7 July 2017 the United Nations General assembly adopted a treaty to prohibit nuclear weapons. Over 120 countries supported this move, not including nuclear weapons powers or Australia, which boycotted the discussions. This Action Alert highlights the features of the treaty and the options available to influence Australia to sign up to it.*

### The Treaty Process

The Treaty resulted from months of negotiation involving civil society groups as well as nations. Much of the momentum has been led by ICAN – the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons – formed in 2007 in Vienna. Three international meetings were held in Norway, Mexico and Austria based on a [Humanitarian Initiative](#) – a pledge by many countries to work for a ban because of the unacceptable humanitarian disaster that the use of nuclear weapons would cause. The failure of existing mechanisms including the Non-Proliferation Treaty to make progress added pressure for a change.

Biological weapons and chemical weapons were prohibited by treaties in 1972 and 1992 respectively. The new treaty completes the banning of weapons of mass destruction. It will be open for signing from mid-September, and once 50 states have ratified it, it will enter into force. Ratification usually requires national legislation.

### The Treaty Provisions

ICAN has summarized the content of the Treaty as follows:

- Comprehensively bans nuclear weapons and related activity – use, development, testing, production, manufacturing, acquiring, possession, stockpiling, transferring, receiving, threatening to use, stationing, installation, or deploying.
- Bans any assistance with prohibited acts – states not to engage in military preparations and planning to use nuclear weapons, financing their development, or permitting their transfer.
- Creates a path for nuclear states to eliminate weapons, stockpiles and programs.

- Verifies that states meet their obligations, and strengthens the safeguards over time.
- Requires victim and international assistance and environmental remediation.

## Responses

The Australian Government and Opposition still rely on Extended Nuclear Deterrence as a pillar of our defence policy, and therefore will not make significant moves to support the Treaty without considerable pressure from public opinion. The Labor Party did take initiatives under Prime Ministers Keating and Rudd to support talks on nuclear disarmament, but these do not seem to have changed the Party's overall commitment to a 'nuclear umbrella'. The Greens are much more interested in supporting such initiatives as the Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty.

Faith Communities have issued a Statement following the adoption of the Treaty. It includes representatives from all major faiths, including Quakers. Its main points are:

- Having repeatedly voiced our grave concerns about the humanitarian and environmental consequences of any use of nuclear weapons, we welcome the adoption of this Treaty as a vital step toward the goal of a world free from nuclear weapons.
- People have the right to live in security and dignity, and we must exercise the stewardship that will safeguard the planet for future generations. Nuclear weapons are incompatible with these values and commitments.
- We acknowledge the courage of survivors of nuclear tests and the effects of radiation for their advocacy to prevent unacceptable suffering of others.
- We accept responsibility for raising awareness of the risks and consequences of nuclear weapons and for building a global constituency to support the Treaty.

Sue Wareham from the ICAN group in Australia has written an article for *New Matilda* (12 July) in which she says that:

- The new Treaty categorically rejects any role for nuclear weapons in anyone's hands. The myth of nuclear deterrence is exposed as being not only immoral but fraught with danger.
- If we rely on the nuclear weapons states to disarm, it is equivalent to insisting that criminals draft legislation that might curb their activities.
- The Treaty sets a new standard for all nations, and should give pause to any plans to expand further the nuclear arsenals of the world.

Richard Falk (Professor of International Law at Princeton University USA) has, in an article in *Japan Focus* on 15 July, made the following assessment:

- World opinion has moved to an anti-nuclear-weapons view, and this challenges the credibility of the nuclear weapons states in committing to further investment in such weapons.
- The absence of nuclear weapons states from the negotiations poses a big problem in achieving the desired outcome. Already France, US and UK have stated they will not sign or ratify the Treaty.
- The best hope for change is a combination of the Treaty's principles and 'restorative diplomacy, whereby states such as North Korea are offered non-military options instead of threats of attack.
- An ongoing hurdle is that state sovereignty allows any state to withdraw from the Treaty on 'national interest' grounds. Nevertheless the Treaty does offer the possibility of stigmatizing nuclear weapons and a negotiation process towards disarmament.

Australian Quakers, at their annual gathering in Adelaide from 8-15 July, celebrated the adoption of the Treaty and deplored Australia's decision not to participate in the negotiations for the Treaty. Quakers supported the attendance at the United Nations meetings of an Aboriginal woman from Central Australia whose community was badly affected by nuclear tests in the past. Quakers also affirmed the vital role of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), and the Medical Association for the Prevention of War (MAPW) in the work they did towards adoption of the Treaty.

The Presiding Clerk, Jo Jordan, was authorized to write to the Prime Minister urging the Government to sign the Treaty.

### **Action**

QPLC is planning to develop a lobbying campaign over the coming months to seek a change in Australia's approach to the Treaty. Further details will be distributed in due course. In the meantime you are encouraged to contact your MPs and Senators with a request that they look carefully at the Treaty and consider whether they can support it and urge their political colleagues to do so.

The text of the Treaty is at [www.un.org/disarmament/ptnw/](http://www.un.org/disarmament/ptnw/)  
Further information is available from [www.icanw.org/au](http://www.icanw.org/au)

Canberra  
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