

# First Committee 2019

## ICAN statement to the First Committee of the UN General Assembly, New York, 18 October 2019

Three weeks ago, in this building, the prime minister of a nuclear-armed nation issued a chilling warning to the UN membership. “When a nuclear-armed country fights to the end,” he said, “it will have consequences far beyond the borders. It will have consequences for the world. That’s not a threat,” he added. “It’s a fair worry. Where are we headed?”

Nuclear-armed nations, it seems, are headed inexorably towards a new nuclear arms race, which might ultimately result in unparalleled catastrophe. Instead of abiding by hard-fought disarmament agreements, they are ripping them up or simply ignoring them, while rapidly bolstering their nuclear forces with plans to retain them for decades to come. Veiled and even explicit threats to unleash the full destructive potential of their nuclear forces have become astonishingly commonplace.

But a majority of the world’s nations are moving determinedly in the opposite direction, towards a permanent ban on the worst weapons of mass destruction. On 26 September this year – the same week as the warning from the nuclear-armed leader – nine nations signed and five ratified the landmark Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

In doing so, they and others before them have signalled their total rejection of these abhorrent, earth-endangering devices, and have contributed to the strengthening of global norms against their use and possession by any state.

This long-overdue treaty, adopted in 2017, now has 33 states parties and 79 signatories. The newest state party is Dominica, which deposited its instrument of ratification today. Thus, the treaty is precisely two-thirds of the way to becoming binding international law.

Only 17 further ratifications are needed to place nuclear weapons, at long last, on the same legal footing as chemical and biological weapons. We urge all states that have not yet done so to sign and ratify this indispensable treaty as a matter of urgency.

If you think that nuclear weapons do not affect your country, you should think again. The 14,000 nuclear weapons that exist in the world today pose an acute existential threat to all of us.

No nation is immune to the radioactive fallout that would transcend national borders if these weapons were ever used again. No nation is immune to the climate disruption, agricultural and economic collapse, mass human displacement and famine that would inevitably follow even a limited nuclear war. Wherever in the world you live, complacency in the face of this ultimate menace is not an option.

Signing and ratifying the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons is a simple but important step that each and every country can – and must – take to help bring the era of nuclear weapons to a permanent end. Each new signature and ratification takes us closer to that goal.

For those nations that voted in favour of the adoption of the treaty in 2017, we urge you to complete your ratification processes as soon as possible.

For those nations that continue to assert that nuclear weapons – despite their catastrophic consequences for humanity – are somehow legitimate, we urge you to consider seriously what your continued inaction could mean for humanity.

Where are we headed?

Thank you.