



# COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

**ICAN CAMPAIGNERS MEETING/GENEVA**

## Countering common misconceptions and arguments against a ban

Arguments against banning nuclear weapons take various forms but generally revolve around the notion that nuclear disarmament is the prerogative of the nuclear-armed states, and that the status quo is preferable to any change.

### 1. Common arguments against a ban treaty

#### 1. It won't work

It will not be effective; it will add nothing to existing NPT obligations; it will not lead to nuclear-armed states giving up their arsenals.

#### 2. It will work

It will destabilize the security environment; it will jeopardize strategic stability; it will leave only rogue states like North Korea with nuclear weapons.

#### 3. It is unbalanced

It does not take security considerations into account; it does not accommodate the legitimate security concerns of states.

#### 4. It is not a shortcut

It is not a substitute for hard, step-by-step work involving the nuclear-armed states; it is not realistic or practical.

#### 5. It will be divisive

It will fragment the international community, widen gaps, and alienate the nuclear-armed states, making progress on disarmament more difficult.

#### 7. It will undermine the NPT.

#### 8. the time is not right

It may be needed once nuclear weapons are eliminated, but not now.

#### 9. NATO won't join

Countries in nuclear alliances like NATO can't sign a ban treaty or won't participate in negotiations.

### FOR MORE INFO ON OTHER MYTHS ABOUT NUCLEAR WEAPONS:

Article 36- 'Responses to ten criticisms'

<http://www.article36.org/publications/>

## 2. How to respond to criticisms

Many of these arguments are self-evidently nonsensical once exposed and examined closely. A useful general approach is therefore to draw the arguments out by asking questions and challenging assumptions.

### A. FOCUS ON THE BAN TREATY, NOT ON THE TOTAL ELIMINATION

A debate on the merits of a ban treaty is easily diverted into a debate on the likelihood of the total elimination of nuclear weapons. Do not let this happen. All countries agree on the need for nuclear disarmament; the 191 members of the NPT are legally bound to pursue it.

- Highlight the unacceptable humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons cause, and the associated risks. (Refer to the humanitarian impact mini-guide).
- Emphasize the government's existing legal and political commitment to disarmament.
- Focus on the need to stigmatize and prohibit nuclear weapons in order to create the conditions for nuclear disarmament. ■



## B. EXPLAIN WHAT THE BAN TREATY IS INTENDED TO ACHIEVE, AND HOW IT WILL WORK

- A ban treaty will not immediately result in nuclear-armed states giving up their weapons. It is not a magic solution, but a necessary step in a process.
- Its purpose is to remove the current ambiguity, establish an absolute prohibition, and over time build a strong international norm against nuclear weapons.
- It will stigmatize nuclear weapons, magnifying domestic and international pressures on nuclear-armed states to make progress on disarmament.
- It will allow states to express their absolute rejection of nuclear weapons, through a legal instrument that does not legitimize the retention of nuclear weapons by five states.
- It will prohibit reliance on the nuclear weapons of other states, and will thus force states in nuclear alliances to review their positions.
- It will provide a sound legal and

administrative basis on which to pursue future disarmament and verification measures.

- It can be pursued even without the nuclear-armed states; all other proposed efforts are dependent on the participation of those with nuclear weapons and all of them are currently blocked by one or more nuclear-armed states.
- There is no guarantee of success, but experience with treaties banning biological and chemical weapons, antipersonnel landmines and cluster munitions suggests that a treaty banning nuclear weapons will affect the behaviour of states, whether or not they join it. ■

### FOR MORE INFO ON HOW A TREATY WOULD WORK:

Read Article 36 and Reaching Critical Will paper 'A Treaty banning nuclear weapons: Developing a legal framework for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons'

<http://www.article36.org/publications/>

## C. DEBUNK SPECIFIC MISCONCEPTIONS AND FALSE ACCOUNTS

### On destabilization and security considerations

- How exactly would a ban treaty harm the security of any state?
- A ban treaty does not impose unilateral nuclear disarmament; it cannot magically force countries to give up their nuclear weapons.
- States will only give up nuclear weapons if and when they calculate it is in their interests to do so; a ban is intended to alter this calculation.
- Do “security considerations” mean that nuclear disarmament should be abandoned? If so, doesn't that contradict the NPT? If not, then what do they mean exactly?
- Using “security considerations” as a justification to oppose a ban (i.e. to defend the legitimacy of nuclear weapons) incites proliferation: North Korea uses “security considerations” to justify its nuclear weapons.

### On a shortcut, or a substitute for existing approaches

- The ban treaty has never been proposed as a shortcut or panacea.
- Neither is it a substitute for a “step-by-step”, “building block”, “full spectrum” or “progressive” approach, or for “hard work”, or for engaging the nuclear-armed states.
- The ban treaty is itself just a step that can and should be pursued in parallel with other measures, which it will complement and support; there is no need to choose.

### On divisiveness

- Some countries oppose a ban treaty because it will be divisive, but it will only be divisive if they oppose it.
- All states are committed to nuclear disarmament. So why would any state be upset by a treaty it doesn't have to join, which prohibits a weapon it has “unequivocally undertaken” to eliminate?
- Opposition to a ban shows why a ban is needed. If everyone was truly committed to eliminating nuclear weapons, nobody would object to a ban – but then a ban would not be needed. ■

## On undermining the NPT

- How exactly would a ban treaty undermine the NPT, when the fundamental purpose of both treaties is the same, and the ban treaty will have stronger provisions?
- There are multiple precedents for newer, stronger treaties coexisting with – and strengthening – older, weaker ones (e.g. the Anti-personnel Landmine Ban Convention and the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons).
- Whatever the NPT nuclear-weapon states think of a ban, their obligations under the NPT will remain.

## On a ban only after elimination

- If a prohibition will be needed one day, why not do it now?
- Prohibition has preceded elimination in all other cases: biological and chemical weapons, anti-personnel landmines, cluster munitions.
- There is no reason it should be different for nuclear weapons.

## On NATO and nuclear alliances

- Given NATO's goal of a world without nuclear weapons, and each NATO member's NPT obligations, NATO will one day be a military alliance without nuclear weapons. Work towards this should start now, by engaging in the process to prohibit nuclear weapons.
- NATO states can formulate their own national nuclear policies, and it is possible for a different NATO states to take different positions on nuclear weapons.

## FOUR MORE TIPS...

- 1** Don't feel intimidated! You've got this!
- 2** Switch to the future tense eg: 'when a ban is in place'
- 3** Use their 'code words' but use your arguments. This means, don't get entangled in a discussion on deterrence.
- 4** Express your opinion reluctantly. Say you used to believe the other side but switched in the face of a change or overwhelming evidence. "Yes, I used to think that myself. But here's what changed my mind..."



### LEARN MORE:

Follow Wilfire>\_'s blog:  
[www.wildfire.org](http://www.wildfire.org)

Read ICAN's 'Common  
misconceptions about a ban'

<http://www.icanw.org/oewg-2016/> ■

*Author: Richard Lenanne, Wildfire>\_  
Layout and art direction: Daniela Varano*

**BAN NUCLEAR**

**WEAPONS NOW**