



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

Read ICAN's 'Common
misconceptions about a ban'

<http://www.icanw.org/oewg-2016/> ■

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BAN NUCLEAR

WEAPONS NOW