

ICAN briefing note for governments

NPT PREPARATORY COMMITTEE

From 28 April to 9 May 2014, the Third Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) for the 2015 Review Conference (RevCon) of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) will meet in New York.

The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), a global civil society coalition of 361 organisations in 92 countries, calls on states, international organisations, civil society organisations and other actors to take immediate action to support a multilateral process of negotiations for a new legal instrument prohibiting nuclear weapons.

The purpose of the NPT is to prevent the humanitarian and environmental consequences of nuclear weapons use by halting proliferation and achieving the total elimination of nuclear weapons through good faith negotiations. The 2010 RevCon expressed “deep concern at the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons”. Since then, the humanitarian perspective has become the dominant theme in the international nuclear weapons debate, as shown by the high attendance at the Oslo and Nayarit conferences on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons and by the overwhelming support for several joint statements expressing concern at the devastating humanitarian consequences of these weapons, most recently at the 2013 PrepCom and in the 2013 First Committee of the UN General Assembly. During the Nayarit conference, Austria announced its intention to take discussions of the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons forward by hosting a follow-up conference in Vienna later this year.

In light of evidence demonstrating the catastrophic humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons and the risk of their use by accident, miscalculation or design, the lack of progress in the implementation of Article VI of the NPT, as well as in other disarmament forums, is unacceptable. Already 115 states have prohibited nuclear weapons on a regional basis through Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones treaties. Yet, in contrast to other weapons of mass destruction, nuclear weapons are not yet subject to an international legal prohibition. ICAN believes the only logical response to the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons is to start a process of negotiation for a legal prohibition on these weapons, even if the nuclear-armed states refuse to participate. Such an instrument would fulfil and strengthen the NPT and create conditions for disarmament by establishing a clear norm against possession of nuclear weapons; challenge the assertion that nuclear weapons provide security; provide a strong moral incentive for nuclear possessor states to eliminate their arsenals; reinforce non-proliferation; and increase the likelihood for a successful outcome of the 2015 RevCon.

ICAN therefore encourages all states, during the general debate and the cluster one session of the 2014 PrepCom, to welcome the Vienna conference; to express support for an international treaty banning nuclear weapons; and to consider including the following key messages in their statements:

- The humanitarian consequences of any nuclear weapon detonation would be catastrophic and would spread beyond borders remaining for generations to come.
- It is in the interest of the very survival of humanity that nuclear weapons are never used again, under any circumstances.
- The risk of a nuclear weapon detonation is significant, with recent research on accidents and near-misses exposing the unsustainable nature of the status quo.
- Awareness of the catastrophic consequences of nuclear weapons must underpin all approaches and efforts towards nuclear disarmament.
- A legal instrument prohibiting nuclear weapons would strengthen the NPT by fulfilling the Treaty’s disarmament and non-proliferation objectives.
- It is time to start a process of negotiations for a new legal instrument prohibiting nuclear weapons, even if the nuclear-armed states refuse to participate.