



**Regional Forum for ECOWAS Member States on the Treaty  
on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)  
August 15-16, 2019 in Abuja, Nigeria**

**Statement**

**The TPNW and West Africa**

1. The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) and the West African Forum of ICAN Campaigners organized on 15-16 August 2019 in Abuja, Nigeria a Regional Forum for Member States of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), to take stock of the Treaty from a regional perspective; assess its prospects for advancing nuclear disarmament, global security and humanitarian norms; and canvass progress toward its entry into force. In attendance were representatives of West African countries,<sup>1</sup> officials of the ECOWAS Parliament and Commission, as well as representatives of Mexico, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and civil society organizations.
2. The Regional Forum for member states of the ECOWAS on the TPNW took place at a time of heightened risks of use of nuclear weapons – the highest since the Cold War. The existence of nuclear weapons, thousands on high alert, combined with continued reliance on nuclear weapons in military doctrines and security concepts and threats of possible use of nuclear weapons, are widely seen as increasing the risk of a deliberate or accidental nuclear detonation.
3. Meanwhile, the slow pace of progress toward a nuclear weapon-free world, the continued lack of implementation of nuclear disarmament obligations, notably Article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and other agreed steps and actions on nuclear disarmament remain a cause of concern. Participants took note with regret that the nuclear armed states have not engaged constructively with the Treaty and the “Humanitarian Initiative on Nuclear Weapons,” and further urged them to do so as a way to ensure the rest of the world of their commitment to peace and fundamental human rights.
4. Any use of nuclear weapons would have catastrophic humanitarian consequences. Nuclear weapons have the potential to cause destruction, death, displacement, starvation and epidemics on a global scale, threatening the very survival of humanity. Nuclear weapons, if used again, will have a profound impact on States far beyond the targeted areas, including those belonging to nuclear-weapon-free zones. Nuclear weapons cause long-term, severe

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<sup>1</sup> Of the permanent representations to ECOWAS of Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, The Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Nigeria, Sierra Leone; of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Ghana, Guinea and Nigeria; as well as of the Federal Ministry of Justice of Nigeria.

and widespread damage to the environment, the climate, human health and well-being, socio-economic development and the social order.

5. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) continues to stress that no adequate humanitarian response would be possible in the aftermath of a nuclear attack. All regions and peoples have a stake in efforts to advance international humanitarian law and the elimination of nuclear weapons.
6. Member States of ECOWAS have always been a strong proponent of multilateralism and human security. Demonstrating their long-held principled position on nuclear disarmament, African countries, driven by a deep sense of responsibility, were very active in the “Humanitarian Initiative on Nuclear Weapons” and continued to be a leading voice in the negotiating process which resulted in the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) on 7 July 2017 – the first global, legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons.
7. The TPNW was recognized as a historic achievement, to which countries of the region contributed significantly. They were among the first to sign the Treaty. To date, one ECOWAS Member State has ratified the TPNW (The Gambia) and seven others have signed it (Benin, Cabo Verde, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Nigeria and Togo); some are now working on domestic procedures towards ratification or planning to initiate such procedures. Participants acknowledged the important role countries of the region and the ECOWAS Commission have to play towards the Treaty’s early entry into force. The holding of this Forum can contribute to this process.
8. Participants expressed the need for more sensitization, knowledge-sharing and capacity-building on the “Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons” and the TPNW at the national and regional levels. They further identified competing priorities and insufficient coordination among the challenges to overcome in order to ensure the prompt entry into force of the Treaty. The role of civil society in addressing these challenges was emphasized and encouraged.
9. No ECOWAS State possesses nuclear weapons or claims to be protected by nuclear weapons. All ECOWAS States are in full compliance with the prohibitions contained in Article 1 of the TPNW. It was noted that the Treaty of Pelindaba of 1996, which establishes Africa as an internationally recognized nuclear-weapon-free zone, contains similar prohibitions to those contained in the TPNW. Thus, signature and ratification of the TPNW by any State party to the Treaty of Pelindaba should not present any challenges in terms of ratification and implementation into national legislation. The TPNW aims to universalize the norms enshrined in the Treaty of Pelindaba.
10. Participants stressed that the TPNW is fully compatible with and complementary to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and other nuclear non-proliferation instruments. The TPNW, and efforts to advance nuclear disarmament, support progress in attainment of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The current expenditure on nuclear

weapons by nuclear-armed states reduces funding for development and achievement of the SDGs.

### **Next Steps on the TPNW**

11. The TPNW will enter into force once 50 states have ratified or acceded to it. African states must maintain the leadership role they played during the negotiations by adding their voice, their vote and their signature and/or ratification in support of the TPNW. In order to do so, the need to deepen cooperation and collaboration among ECOWAS member states on the issue was identified.
12. Participants expressed their strong support for achieving the swift entry into force of the TPNW as a vital step towards achieving a world free of nuclear weapons and agreed to work toward signature and ratification (as applicable) of the Treaty.
13. Participants in the Forum recognize and applaud African countries for their courage to declare the continent a nuclear-weapon-free zone, the Member States of ECOWAS for their strong stance against the sale and movement of small arms and light weapons and ammunition within the region. The participants urge ECOWAS, in collaboration with ICAN and the ICRC, to work towards putting the issue of the TPNW on the agenda of the next meetings of the ECOWAS Council of Ministers and that of the Authority of Heads of States Summit, in order to galvanize regional momentum towards signature and ratification of the TPNW. Encouragement and support by the ECOWAS Commission and the continued engagement of the ECOWAS Parliament were seen as important in this regard as well. The ICRC and ICAN expressed their willingness to support these efforts.
14. The participants further expressed their interest in participating in future regional meetings on this topic in order to deepen engagement on the issue, including by discussing the Treaty's provisions on national implementation.
15. A high-level TPNW signing and ratification ceremony will take place in New York on 26 September 2019, at the occasion of the UN International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons. ECOWAS Member States were encouraged to seize this opportunity.
16. Participants were also encouraged to make use of the existing assistance tools including the Signature and Ratification Kit for the Treaty published by the ICRC as well as the Information Kit on Signature and Ratification published by the UN Office of Disarmament Affairs (ODA) and the UN Office of Legal Affairs (OLA).
17. Participants agreed to collaborate towards entry into force and faithful implementation of the TPNW, and to continue to engage actively, including in all appropriate regional contexts, for the signature, ratification and implementation of the TPNW.

*Abuja, 16 August 2019*