



NUCLEAR BAN DAILY



Reaching Critical Will

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THE NEW REALITY

Ray Acheson | *Reaching Critical Will, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom*

Yesterday, we banned nuclear weapons. It's still hard to believe this is the case. It hasn't fully sunk in yet, the enormity of what just happened. Even as survivors, activists, politicians, and diplomats celebrated in New York and around the world, many expressed amazement that we actually pulled it off.

It was a long campaign. Activism against nuclear weapons has been fierce and determined for over seventy years. But it wasn't until recent years, when a few courageous diplomats in partnership with a group of civil society actors working as part of or in collaboration with the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons decided to take a leap into the unknown, that we managed to finally develop international law condemning and prohibiting these last weapons of mass destruction.

Working together, we foregrounded our actions in resistance and hope. Resistance to the pressure from nuclear-armed and nuclear-alliance states. Resistance to attitudes of cynicism and of defeatism. Resistance to

staying the course, being placated, being told to be patient, that the "important" countries will handle this matter. Hope that change is possible. Hope that by working together we can achieve something that can disrupt some of the most powerful, heavily militarised structures and doctrines in the entire world. Hope that a shared sense of humanity could prevail against all odds. Irish Foreign Minister Simon Coveney quoted Seamus Heaney in his remarks on Friday, that "hope is not optimism, which expects things to turn out well, but something rooted in the conviction that there is a good worth working for."

There were incredible obstacles in our way. We were challenging power. In response, many forces of that power were unleashed upon us—politically, and sometimes personally. In her closing statement, Ambassador Nozipho Mxakato-Diseko of South Africa noted the "an incredible amount of pressure" on her continent not to participate. We saw this pressure placed on many countries in October before the General Assembly voted to begin these negotiations.

Nuclear Ban Daily is produced by Reaching Critical Will, the disarmament programme of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) during meetings related to the UN conference to negotiate a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading to their elimination, taking place 15 June-7 July 2017. The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of WILPF.

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Conference president Ambassador Elayne Whyte reacts to the treaty adoption, 7 July 2017 © Xanthe Hall

Editorial, continued

We saw it even when states were organising conferences to examine the humanitarian impacts of nuclear weapons.

The key was not to allow these obstacles to be insurmountable. This is a choice. One can either give up or keep fighting. No obstacle is actually too big; it's just a matter of figuring out how to go under, around, over, or through it. On Friday, 7 July, 122 governments voted yes for humanity. They took courage in their collective endeavor, and in the support of civil society filling the gallery behind them beyond capacity. They also took courage in their "moral duty," as Ambassador Mxakato-Diseko put it, noting that "to have voted no would have been a slap in the face to the victims of Nagasaki and Hiroshima."

Banning nuclear weapons was not an insurmountable challenge, just as achieving the elimination of nuclear weapons is not insurmountable. The day after the adoption of this treaty we are already seeing the flood of commentary on how useless what we did is. How this treaty will change nothing; how we've only created divisions; how we haven't eliminated a single nuclear weapon. It will continue to be an epic mansplaining session until the trolls, who have invested their academic or political careers in reinforcing the status quo by explaining ad nauseam that this is how things are and that things can never change, get bored and move on. (Proving them wrong is apparently not sufficient—they said we could never ban nuclear weapons and now that we have, the issue its utility, not its possibility.)

It's okay, they can have their space to complain and critique—they have always taken up this space, and until we do more to disrupt the structures that keep them safely ensconced in that space, they will continue to do so. In the meantime, the feminists, the queers, the people of colour, the survivors, the determined diplomats, the passionate politicians, the thoughtful academics, the fierce activists—the rebels and the brave—will do what we can to keep making change. We do so to honour the people who have suffered from nuclear violence. We do so to ensure that respect, dignity, courage, and love are the dominant traits of humanity, rather than our capacity for self-destruction, selfishness, or fear.

There is time for celebration but not self-congratulation. There is only time for more work. Just like the critics warned, this treaty has not magically eliminated nuclear weapons over night. We always knew it would be harder than that. But as atomic bomb survivor Setsuko Thurlow said in her remarkable closing statement to the conference on Friday, "This is the beginning of the end

of nuclear weapons." This treaty was conceived of as a tool that could help change the politics and economics of nuclear weapons as a means of facilitating disarmament. The text that we adopted on Friday is well suited to this task. It provides a solid foundation to change policies and practices, as well as to shift the thinking and discourse on nuclear weapons even further than the process to ban them already has.

We have not, as a species, been able to figure out how to solve everything at once. We struggle sometimes to even keep things on the right track, tenuous and fragile as that track can sometimes be. But we can work together to do extraordinary things—and we should do it more often. It just takes courage. It sounds over simplified, but it's really not. We're taught that this is a naive approach to the world—it's engrained in us as we become adults that idealism and activism are youthful pursuits. They are not. They are the pursuits of the brave, of all ages, backgrounds, and beliefs.

This is a treaty made by people. By diplomats who got inspired by an idea and went home to change their government's positions. By activists writing, thinking, and convening, bringing together governments and civil society groups to figure out how to make things happen. By survivors who give their testimony despite the personal trauma of reliving their experiences. By direct action crews who get arrested for breaking into nuclear weapon facilities or blockading nuclear transports or military bases. By campaigners who mobilise nationally to raise awareness and pressure their governments. By politicians who truly represent the will of their people and speak the truth in parliaments. By academics who write the theory or record the process.

This treaty is an amazing feat of collective action by people who came together to do something that had not been tried before. Like anything created by people, it has its imperfections. But it's a good start on the road to abolition, and it gives a glimpse of what is possible in this world. That, all on its own, has meaning. •



NEWS IN BRIEF

Allison Pytlak | *Reaching Critical Will of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom*

The conference opened with the Chair of the Credentials Committee giving the committee's report, which was adopted. The President then moved to the adoption of the draft treaty by consensus. She described the work of the conference over the last several weeks as having been bolstered by a common determination. "We are just a few moments away from saying to the survivors, to our children that yes, it is possible to inherit a world free of nuclear weapons for future generations." After sustained applause, however, the Netherlands took the floor to make a formal objection to the adoption of the treaty by consensus, and requested a formal recorded vote. The voting result was 122-1-1. The treaty was adopted to thunderous applause and cheering.

Around 40 delegations took the floor to deliver explanations of vote. Nearly every delegation spoke of the new treaty as groundbreaking, historic and a significant step forward. Many referred to it as laying the foundation for the elimination of nuclear weapons and as a triumph of multilateralism. Trinidad and Tobago said that it has "shattered the chronic stalemate" in nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

There were multiple positive statements about the contributions from civil society throughout the process and urging that it continue through the stages of entry into force and implementation. Egypt said that although civil society is traditionally seated at the back of UN conference rooms, "their devotion places them at the forefront of our respect".

Ambassador Boukadoum of Algeria, who had chaired the First Committee session where the resolution mandating these treaty negotiations was adopted, expressed personal satisfaction at seeing the process completed.

Some delegations provided commentary on the treaty itself:

- Cuba, Iran welcomed the inclusion of threat of use as a prohibited activity.
- Argentina, Ecuador, Iran, Peru, and Venezuela stated they would have liked to see a prohibition on transit included. Iran would have liked the prohibition on testing to explicitly include all forms of testing.
- Colombia would have preferred greater clarity in articles 1 and 2.4 to avoid differing interpretations. Switzerland is concerned that some provisions lack clarity and could give rise to different interpretations and create confusion.
- Ecuador said it will interpret assistance to include financing, and testing to apply to explosive and non-explosive tests.

- Costa Rica is especially pleased with the treaty's positive obligations and that it recognizes the needs of victims and the disproportionate impact of nuclear weapons on women, girls and indigenous populations. Trinidad and Tobago is pleased that these provisions are anchored in humanitarian principles.
- The Marshall Islands noted the importance of having included the responsibility for those that have used or tested nuclear weapons in providing assistance.
- Argentina welcomed the reference to the NPT as the cornerstone of nuclear disarmament. It believes that article 3 will strengthen the NPT but cautioned against interpreting this article in a way that will bring in a variety of legal sources and potentially jeopardize the safeguards systems of the NPT. Article 4's implementation must be based on existing institutions like the IAEA.
- Austria said that states have taken care to ensure that the new treaty complements existing disarmament architecture and strengthens the NPT. Ireland recalled the "Irish resolutions" in 1958 that led to the NPT, and views the new treaty as strengthening it and the shared global vision of a world free of nuclear weapons.
- Guatemala said the treaty is robust and rooted in the NPT.
- Switzerland expressed concern that some provisions pose risks for existing norms, instruments and fora, citing the CTBT as one example. It felt that the text could have been more affirmative with respect to commitments to the NPT.
- Sweden is convinced that the norm against possession and use will be strengthened by this treaty, and the reaffirmation of the fundamental importance of the humanitarian perspective. It has concerns about how the treaty's relationship to the NPT is framed, and would have preferred more clarity in several articles and paragraphs as well as to not have included testing, and to have deleted the last several words in article 18. It does not subscribe to pre-ambular paragraph 10, and is disappointed at the treatment of verification.
- Netherlands, the only country to vote against adoption, explained that article 1 is contrary to its commitments under NATO. It feels that the treaty undermines the NPT and has inadequate verification provisions. It said it will work to bridge the gap between treaty supporters and non-supporters.

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News in brief, continued

- Singapore, the only country to abstain in the vote, explained that several of its proposals were not included, such as the deletion of ambiguous phrasing in article 18 and including language based on article 7 of the nuclear weapon free zone treaty in the Middle East. It also expressed concern about the treaty's relationship to the NPT as well as other agreements.

Some states also commented on the process and the way ahead:

- Chile, Liechtenstein, and Kazakhstan regretted that there had to be vote.
- South Africa said that to no would have been a slap in the face to the victims and survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
- Palestine said a nuclear weapon free zone in the Middle East is more urgent than ever.
- Liechtenstein noted the treaty leaves an open door for accession of nuclear-armed states. South Africa, ASEAN, the Arab Group, Ireland, Bolivia, Algeria, and others referenced the importance of engaging with nuclear-armed states toward their future participation in the treaty.
- Austria proposed hosting the first meeting of states parties in Vienna and urged working toward an early entry-into-force.
- Switzerland and Sweden referenced the need for closer domestic assessment.
- The Marshall Islands said to not confuse its 'yes' vote for the process of joining as it needs to examine the text.
- Trinidad and Tobago noted the treaty is situated in the broader context of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

After explanations of vote, the conference adopted its draft report. Mexico asked that the conference report be updated to make it clear that the conference has adopted the treaty, so that there is no doubt about its legal status.

Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, the UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, delivered a statement that reinforced the conference's efforts to ensure the treaty has complementarity to the NPT. She noted the pathway is open for nuclear-armed states to join. She further appealed to states to use this treaty to help fill the political gap, having filled the legal gap.

The ICRC and OPANAL delivered statements that welcomed the new treaty and their commitment to advancing it.

Abacca Anjain Maddison from the Marshall Islands delivered the closing remarks for the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, noting that this treaty is not just the product of those in the room who have created the language of the treaty text but also of those who have marched in the streets around the world.

Setsuko Thurlow, an atomic bomb survivor from Hiroshima, delivered a powerful closing statement expressing joy at the adoption of this treaty, for which she has waited for seven decades. "We've always known that nuclear weapons are immoral," she said. "Now they are also illegal." •

On the day of the adoption of the Treaty Prohibiting Nuclear Weapons friends gathered, dialogued and shared moments of silence during the morning interfaith vigil.

"As people of faith we accept as our special responsibility the work of raising awareness of the risks and consequences of nuclear weapons for current and future generations, awakening public conscience to build a global popular constituency in support of the Treaty in order to achieve and sustain a world free from nuclear weapons." (7 July 2017, Joint Interfaith Statement)



THE SPIRIT OF LYSISTRATA: GENDER, COLLECTIVE ACTION, AND THE NUCLEAR WEAPONS BAN

Matthew Bolton | International Disarmament Institute, Pace University

What does a 5th century BCE war in ancient Greece have to do with banning nuclear weapons in 2017? Well, the theorists who conceptualized nuclear “deterrence” during the Cold War were inspired by Thucydides’ account of the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BCE) between Athens and Sparta and their respective alliances of city-states.

Thucydides’ experience of the fighting—as a General and later a refugee—led him to a deeply pessimistic and tragic view of humanity. He believed that mutual fear made Athens and Sparta increase their military preparations, frightening each other further and inevitably leading to war. Cold War international relations scholars drew on Thucydides to argue that the modern state-system was anarchic in nature. States’ pursuit of self-interest pulled them inexorably into arms races and competition. Thus to secure themselves, states must prepare for war.

Many of these so-called “neo-realists” claimed that the only way out of this “security dilemma” was to make war so devastating that political leaders and government officials would make rational choices to prevent war. This is the foundation for the doctrine of “mutually assured destruction,” or even more absurdly, the “nuclear peace,” in which nuclear weapons supposedly kept the world at peace after 1945.

This logic is, of course, deeply flawed and ignores the tremendous proxy violence the Cold War visited on supposedly “peripheral” countries, as well as the harm nuclear weapons testing and production caused to indigenous peoples and “downwinders”. Many international relations scholars have now deconstructed the neo-realist position, showing how it is deeply gendered and racialized, enthralled with the obsessions of super-powers and ignoring the role of social norms in shaping state behavior.

But the fixation with (and perhaps misinterpretation) of Thucydides marginalizes the many other voices in ancient Greece who perceived different causes of the Peloponnesian War, as well as potential for political agency in pursuing peace. There were alternative contemporary accounts that are not often taught in the international relations classes where diplomats and military officials get their ideas about how the world works.

For example, the playwright Aristophanes imagined other possibilities. In his play *Lysistrata*, the witty Athenian title protagonist organizes women from across the

Greek peninsula and across generations to resist the war. She and other young women refuse to have sex with men until they stop the fighting. Lysistrata uses humor to puncture the self-importance and weapons fetishism of the men who claim to be “protecting” women and end up actually doing harm. She mobilizes elderly women to occupy the Acropolis and seize the state treasuries, seeking to reorganize the political and economic system.

Lysistrata—despite being written more than two millennia ago—upends conventional wisdom about security. It suggests that overcoming insecurity is not achieved through militarization and mutual threat, but rather through building cosmopolitan linkages across the divisions of culture, gender, and age. It also recognizes the crucial role of non-cooperation and collective action to reorganize our governance in more peaceful and just ways. *Lysistrata* challenges patriarchy and the denigration of the Other, which leads to the kind of dehumanization that excuses threatening whole populations with annihilation.

As I joined the Women’s March to Ban the Bomb on 17 June and have observed the prominent role of women in leading civil society advocacy and the diplomatic process for the nuclear weapons ban treaty at the UN, I perceive the spirit of Lysistrata pushing back against the ghosts of a much-misused Thucydides.

The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) and its member organizations, like WILPF, have highlighted linkages between patriarchy and the persistence of nuclear weapons, particularly the fetishizing discourse that equates missiles with power. They draw inspiration from the brave women of Greenham Common, who demanded attention to the connections between violence against women and LGBTQA people, degradation of the environment, and the insanity of “mutually assured destruction”.

It is thus encouraging to see gender concerns reflected in the ban treaty’s preamble, which acknowledges “disproportionate impact on women and girls, including as a result of ionizing radiation.” It also recognizes that “the equal, full and effective participation of both women and men is an essential factor for the promotion and attainment of sustainable peace and security” and commits states to “strengthening effective participation of women in nuclear disarmament.”

The activists, advocates, and officials pushing for the nuclear ban have realized that resisting the nuclear-

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The spirit of Lysistrata, continued

armed and nuclear-alliance states' chokehold on disarmament diplomacy has required building global coalitions, crossing national boundaries, drawing in people of many different cultures, ages, identities, and political affiliations. They have refused to see "the Other" as objects to be targeted by mass killing. Instead, ICAN and champion states have worked hard to reorganize the political system through which nuclear disarmament is negotiated, making it more open to the concerns of victims and hibakusha, indigenous peoples, people from the Global South, civil society, faith leaders, parliamentarians, and academia.

ICAN and champion states have also pushed for a treaty that will require states to refuse cooperation with the policies and practices that enable nuclear weapons to persist, through calling for prohibitions on assistance, stationing, military preparation and planning. Like Lysistrata, they see the economic vested interests in military arsenals. The preamble decries the "waste of economic and human resources" on nuclear weapons.

Lysistrata would also have directed our attention outside the negotiating room, to the marches and actions around the world in solidarity with the campaign to ban the bomb. The civil disobedience of the 19 people arrested outside the US Mission on 19 June was a profound refusal to cooperate with the institutions that uphold, collude, and protect the weapons that pose the risk of catastrophic humanitarian consequences. They remind us of the many people—including the Plowshares actions—who have been arrested and persecuted by governments for their courageous and principled stand against nuclear weapons.

But Lysistrata would be unimpressed by any attempts to puff ourselves up or be complacent. She would challenge us to keep struggling for a better world by refusing to cooperate with militarism, building bridges across divisions, following the money trail, and laughing at self-importance (that of ourselves as much as others). •

Ambassador Elayne Whyte, president of the nuclear weapon ban treaty conference, and Setsuko Thurlow, atomic bomb survivor. Ambassador Whyte thanked Setsuko in her closing remarks for never letting us rest until we got this done.

Photo © Kathleen Sullivan

