

Statement by the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) to the 80th session of the First Committee of the UN General Assembly

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17 October 2025

Distinguished delegates,

Eighty years ago this August, two nuclear weapons, considered small by today's standards, obliterated Hiroshima and Nagasaki, killing more than a quarter of a million people.

Two months later, a new international organisation was born to "save succeeding generations from the scourge of war", with nuclear disarmament among its paramount objectives.

Today, the risk of a recurrence of the atrocities of August 1945 is perhaps as great as it has ever been.

Last year alone, the nine nuclear-armed states squandered more than 100 billion U.S. dollars enhancing and expanding their nuclear forces – as documented in ICAN's annual nuclear weapons spending report.

None is currently pursuing nuclear disarmament in good faith, as legally required under the NPT. Most no longer even pay lip service to the idea of a nuclear-weapon-free world.

It is a dire state of affairs, made even worse by the prospect of artificial intelligence being integrated into early warning, and command, control and communications systems.

In challenging times like these, rather than lowering expectations and tempering demands, we must pursue the total elimination of nuclear weapons with even greater ambition.

It is worth recalling that, historically, some of the greatest breakthroughs in this field have emerged out of crisis.

But it depends on your seizing this moment to advance what you *know* to be necessary, instead of settling for what you *think* to be possible.

As many delegations have noted, against an otherwise bleak backdrop, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons stands out as a beacon of hope.

As of last month, a majority of the world's nations are either parties or signatories to this landmark accord. ICAN takes this opportunity to congratulate Ghana on its ratification and Kyrgyzstan on its signature.

At a time when multilateralism and international law face extraordinary challenge, adhering to and implementing the TPNW is the strongest action a state can take to reject nuclear weapons, to advance the law and norms of nuclear disarmament, and to act as a further guardrail against proliferation.

Today, ICAN appeals for all states, including those that possess, or claim protection from, nuclear weapons, to join this treaty without delay.

The first review conference of the TPNW, to be held in November 2026 under the presidency of South Africa, would be one milestone to work towards.

As South Africa has proven, disarmament can be achieved when there is political will to do so. And doing so reduces enmity and mistrust in others.

Maintaining nuclear weapons, conversely, undermines international law, human rights, and environmental sustainability – indeed most every principle that the UN stands for.

Eighty years ago, our forebears rose from the ashes of tragedy to create this institution. Now we must do what we know is necessary to fulfil its potential, to eliminate nuclear weapons, and to safeguard our survival as a species.

Thank you.