The government’s ambivalence has sparked the overnight formation of a coalition of Canadian activists, comprising 90 NGOs and 100 individuals, pushing the government to hold a parliamentary debate on the Prohibition Treaty, followed up by a parliamentary committee hearing. Former leader of the coalition, says: “What brings all these organizations and individuals together is the concern that there is a great democratic deficit in Canada that the government is not responding to by concerting to debate the existential threat that nuclear weapons represent to human existence and civilization.”

The “democratic deficit” in Canada is shocking. The government is allowing NATO to bamboozle Canadians with its false nuclear deterrence doctrine. The Prohibition Treaty is an act of conscience by distressed governments and civil society leaders, and it deserves a hearing. Instead of ducking, the Canadian government should encourage a broad dialogue on how security can be maintained without nuclear weapons.

It should acknowledge the Prohibition Treaty and work with NATO to bring the organization into conformity with it.

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At this tense moment, a new Canadian foreign minister, Marc Garneau, takes stage. I hope this highly qualified candidate, the first Canadian astronaut, lives up to the belief he showed when, in opposition, he signed the call by Canadians for a Nuclear Weapons Convention for “all member states of the United Nations — including Canada — to endorse, and begin negotiations for a Nuclear Weapons Convention.”


Nuclear Weapons Treaty Ban Needs Bold Advocacy

By Douglas Roche

The newly established Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) finally prohibits the development, testing, possession, and deployment of nuclear weapons among nations that ratify it.

After 70 years of campaigns to “ban the bomb,” “freeze” the arms race, create “nuclear-free zones,” and curb nuclear weapons proliferation — and after dozens of agreements among nuclear-armed states in which the perpetrators granted themselves permission for their ghastly arsenals — the TPNW makes concrete, detailed, and undeniable an absolute, globally recognized rejection of what’s been called the “ultimate evil.”

Profoundly, the TPNW goes further and specifically forbids the illegal, civilization-endangering practice of “nuclear deterrence” by explicitly outlawing its terrifying definitional essence — the threat to use nuclear weapons.

In addition, the treaty also explicitly recognizes victims and survivors of the dirty and deadly uses to which nuclear weapons have been put — the human radiation experiments and globe-contaminating testing of, and rehearsals for nuclear attacks — that require specific reparations and compensation measures.

As with other struggles for justice and peace that have tested generations — the abolition of slavery, torture, the death penalty, child labor — the TPNW’s campaigners call the new law a major breakthrough, but still just “the beginning of the end of nuclear weapons.”

The new ban treaty follows earlier international prohibitions that outlaw lesser weapons of mass destruction: the Geneva Protocol (outlawing gas warfare), the Hague Conventions (forbidding poisoned weapons), the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Biological Weapons Convention, the Convention on Cluster Munitions, and the (land) Mine Ban.

The new Treaty’s compelling language nearly stings the ears, like an ambulance siren or a fire alarm, blaring repudiation of the world’s most despicable and appalling weapons, devices whose horrifying effects differ from the previously banned arms only in that they exceed beyond comprehensible the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The long-delayed arrival of the TPNW is evidence of the enormous anti-democratic political and financial power and influence that the giant military industries — the only beneficiaries of continuously rebuilding nuclear arsenals — wield over whole nation states. How else to explain the time it’s taken for the community of nations to finally add nuclear weapons to the list?

The scope and power of the TPNW — and even the dodging incoherence of its rejection by nuclear-armed states — are cause for great celebration. The treaty’s detailed, comprehensive articles themselves constitute the basis for 100,000 Women. Scientists’ demands.

From the preamble:

“Cognizant that the catastrophic consequences of nuclear weapons cannot be adequately addressed, transcended national borders, pose grave implications for human survival, the environment, socioeconomic development, the global economy, food security and the health of current and future generations, and have a disproportionate impact on women and girls, including as a result of ionizing radiation...”

Still, nuclear-armed states all insist that their plans and threats to commit atomic violence are legal. The US Navy Field Manual says, “There is at present no rule of international law expressly prohibiting States from the use of nuclear weapons in warfare. In the absence of express prohibition, the use of such weapons... is permitted.”

No more. The TPNW rebukes this artful dodge and its entry into force is a monumental accomplishment. Forbidding nuclear weapons by name is also a triumph of harrowing urgency, considering the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists’ “Doomsday Clock” having been set at 100 seconds to midnight.

Countries with nuclear arsenals ignored the UN negotiations that produced the TPNW and they ignore the law. They and over 30 allies were led in a boycott of the talks by then US UN Ambassador Nikki Haley, who said the treaty would lie on the table while she spoke, the United States was rebukes and nullifies this recondite law. This commentary for the Ottawa, Ontario Hill Times. His latest book is Recovery: Peace Prospects in the Biden Era.

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