

# Campaigner guide to TPNW Signature and Ratification

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) opened for signature in New York on 20 September 2017 and will enter into force once 50 states have ratified or acceded to it. This guide is designed to assist campaigners in promoting signature and ratification of the TPNW.

## UPCOMING HIGH-LEVEL CEREMONY

A high-level ceremony for further signatures and ratifications of the TPNW will be held at the United Nations headquarters in New York on **26 September 2019** at 5:00PM. This is an excellent opportunity for leaders to sign the treaty or deposit their instruments of ratification or accession. A state wishing to participate in the high-level ceremony should register its interest in advance with the UN Office of Legal Affairs.

## Does your country support the TPNW?

To check whether your country has already signed, ratified or acceded to the TPNW, see the [list of signatories and states parties](#) on the ICAN website.

- If your country has **signed but not ratified** the TPNW, it should now take the necessary steps for ratification. See Section 1 below for suggested actions to promote ratification by your country.
- If your country has **neither signed nor ratified** the TPNW, check whether it [voted in favour of the adoption of the TPNW](#) on 7 July 2017 or has indicated its support for the treaty in any other way.
  - For **supportive states**, see Section 2 below for suggested actions.
  - For **unsupportive states**, see Section 3 below for suggested actions.
- If your country has already **ratified or acceded** to the TPNW, no additional formal steps are required. However, Section 4 below offers suggestions for actions by states parties to encourage other states to join the treaty.

## SECTION 1

### Promoting ratification by signatory states

Several states have signed the TPNW but not yet ratified it.

The process of ratification differs from one country to another. Usually it involves a review of the treaty by relevant government departments (*e.g.*, the foreign ministry, defence ministry and attorney-general's office) and approval by the legislature. The judiciary might also assess whether the treaty is consistent with the national constitution. However, in some countries, ratification is more straightforward, involving only the executive.

To complete its ratification process, a state must submit an "instrument of ratification" to the UN Secretary-General. This is a formal document signed by the head of state, head of government or foreign minister declaring that the state consents to be legally bound by the treaty. It is deposited once all domestic processes have been completed. The UN Office of Legal Affairs has provided [sample text](#) for such an instrument.

By ratifying the TPNW promptly, your country can contribute to the treaty's timely entry into force. For most countries that do not possess nuclear weapons, ratification is a straightforward process, as they have already made a legal undertaking under the Non-Proliferation Treaty never to acquire such weapons. Many countries have also supported a prohibition on nuclear weapons at a regional level by joining a nuclear-weapon-free zone.

#### What is the ratification process in your country?

For some countries, information about ratification processes can be readily found online. See this useful [guide](#). For others, you may need to ask an official at the foreign ministry to explain the process. He or she should also be able to advise whether steps have already been taken towards ratification. An official from the parliament might also be able to update you on progress and advise of avenues for civil society input.

#### Possible actions to encourage your country to ratify

- Set up meetings with senior officials who are in a position to influence the speed of ratification, such as the foreign minister, the chair of your parliament's foreign affairs committee, or others who work with them.
- Encourage the Red Cross or Red Crescent national society in your country to promote ratification of the treaty. All such national societies have a [mandate](#) to work towards this goal.
- Write an opinion article about the importance of the treaty for your country and submit it to a newspaper. A government will be more inclined to pursue ratification if it is seen as a matter of public concern.



**Photo:** In April 2019, representatives of the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, an ICAN partner organization, met with senior officials in Kathmandu, including the foreign minister, to promote Nepal's ratification of the TPNW.

## SECTION 2

### Promoting signature by supportive states

The TPNW can be signed in New York at any time. Signature is largely a symbolic act and does not constitute formal consent by the state to be legally bound by the treaty. Many leaders opt to sign treaties during the high-level opening of the UN General Assembly (known as “leaders’ week”), which is held each September.

A head of state (*e.g.*, president), head of government (*e.g.*, prime minister), or foreign minister is automatically empowered to sign the TPNW on behalf of his or her state. Moreover, any one of these individuals may vest that power in another individual (*e.g.*, the state’s permanent representative to the United Nations or a deputy minister).

#### Who makes the decision to sign?

A decision to sign a treaty is typically taken by the executive branch of government. But the precise process for approving signature will differ from one country to another. In many countries, the foreign ministry will review the treaty and the foreign minister will make a recommendation to the cabinet on whether to proceed with signature. The signature process is usually much simpler and less onerous than the process for ratification.

#### Possible actions to encourage your country to sign

- Begin by checking with an official at the foreign ministry (*e.g.*, in the disarmament division) whether the TPNW is under consideration for signature and, if so, what steps need to be taken for approval.

- Write to the foreign minister, or another relevant high-level official, to encourage him or her to sign the TPNW. If possible, arrange a meeting with the minister to set out the case for signature.
- Encourage other influential individuals and organizations to approach the foreign minister to discuss the TPNW (e.g., his or her colleagues in the national parliament or the head of the national Red Cross or Red Crescent society in your country).
- Submit an article to a newspaper explaining the importance of the TPNW and why your country should sign and ratify it.



**Photo:** At a high-level ceremony at the UN headquarters in September 2018, nine new states signed the TPNW and four ratified it. The president of the UN General Assembly, among other dignitaries, spoke at the event.



**Photo:** In May 2019, ICAN campaigners from Ghana, Nigeria and Togo addressed the parliament of the Economic Community of West African States to promote signature and ratification of the TPNW.

## SECTION 3

### Promoting signature by unsupportive states

In countries that have not yet expressed support for the TPNW, different campaign strategies will need to be employed to build political will and a broad constituency in favour of the treaty. Here are some possible actions to consider:

- Reach out to members of your national parliament and ask them to sign the [ICAN Parliamentary Pledge](#). This is an individual commitment to work towards your country's signature and ratification of the TPNW.
- Encourage political parties to embrace the treaty as part of their policy platform. This could be particularly useful in situations where those parties could form a government following an upcoming election.
- Encourage journalists and parliamentarians to question senior officials about their decision not to sign the treaty and, if appropriate, use freedom-of-information laws to expose the underlying reasons for your government's inaction.
- Reach out to members of your local municipal council to enlist your city or town as an endorser of the [ICAN Cities Appeal](#). Cities and towns can help put pressure on your national government to take action.
- Commission an opinion poll from a research agency to demonstrate the high level of public support for your country's ratification of the TPNW. This may give politicians the confidence to act or call out those who are standing in the way.
- Organize public forums, workshops and other events to build a broad-based civil society movement in support of the treaty.



**Photo:** Parliamentarians in Australia show their support for the TPNW at an event in September 2018 organized by ICAN to mark the first anniversary of the treaty's opening for signature.

## SECTION 4

### Encouraging states parties to take further action

There are many actions that states that have already ratified or acceded to the TPNW can take to encourage other states to become parties. For example:

- States parties should refer positively to the TPNW in their national statements to the UN General Assembly and in other relevant international forums, and call on all states that have not yet done so to sign and ratify the treaty.
- States parties can work to ensure that regional bodies promote signature and ratification of the TPNW, *e.g.*, by convening workshops and developing action plans.
- Foreign ministers and other senior officials of states parties can discuss the TPNW on a bilateral basis with their counterparts in states that have not yet joined.



**Photo:** The government of Guyana, in partnership with ICAN, hosted a [regional forum](#) in June 2019 to promote signature and ratification of the TPNW by Caribbean states. Guyana was among the first states to become a party to the treaty in September 2017.



**Photo:** In August 2018, the South African foreign ministry and ICAN co-hosted a [regional conference](#) in Pretoria with delegates from 20 African states to promote signature and ratification of the TPNW across the region.

## FURTHER RESOURCES

- **Ratification kits:** The UN Office for Disarmament Affairs and International Committee of the Red Cross have each published [ratification kits](#) to assist states in becoming parties to the TPNW.
- **Treaty text:** Official [versions](#) of the TPNW exist in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish. Unofficial translations have also been published in a number of other languages.
- **Ban Monitor:** For analysis of the extent to which a state's existing policies and practices comply with or contradict the activities that are prohibited by the TPNW, see the [Ban Monitor](#).

If your government has specific concerns or questions relating to the application of the TPNW or seeks further assistance with their process, the ICAN staff team would be pleased to supply relevant briefing materials and tailored advice. Contact [info@icanw.org](mailto:info@icanw.org).

July 2019

This material was produced with the support of:

