

ICAN Statement to the ECOWAS Parliament

**23 May 2019
Abuja, Nigeria**

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Right Honorable Speaker, honorable members,

It is a great honor to speak here today, on behalf of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) represented here by the West African Campaigners from Nigeria, Ghana and Togo.

As we meet here today, nuclear weapons are again on the international agenda. The **risks** of use of nuclear weapons is on the rise. The International Committee of the Red Cross and the UN humanitarian agencies agree that it is currently as high as the peak of the Cold War.

Over the past weeks, two nuclear-armed states — India and Pakistan — fought out a brief armed conflict that could have seen each use nuclear weapons against the other.

Had they done so, the **devastating consequences** would not have been confined to South-East Asia. Experts have calculated that nuclear war between the two nations involving just 100 Hiroshima-sized weapons would cause worldwide climatic disruption and a catastrophic decline of up to 20% of rice and corn production across the planet. Such decrease in global food supplies could be putting up to 2 billion people at risk of starvation.¹

It might seem like this is an issue for nuclear-armed states only. Africa may be free of nuclear weapons, but the continent is not free of their effects. It's not hard to see how Africa could suffer tremendously from a crisis in which they had no involvement, as the consequences of nuclear weapons do not stop at borders. The impact on food security, migration, infrastructure, and development would be devastating. And just as with other conflict, war and disasters, the most vulnerable communities will be disproportionately affected.

But not only would the use of nuclear weapons impact this continent. The development and testing of these weapons already have. The world is still paying the price for atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons in 1944–80. From

February 1960 to February 1966, France detonated a total of 17 nuclear bombs in the Algerian Sahara. The tests in Algeria spread radioactive fallout across the country, across Central and West Africa, and beyond. Irreversible contamination was inflicted on people, animals, vegetation, and the environment.ⁱⁱ

In 1998 at the UN General Assembly, Nelson Mandela said, “We must ask the question, which might sound naïve to those who have elaborated sophisticated arguments to justify their refusal to eliminate these terrible and terrifying weapons of mass destruction – why do they need them anyway!

In reality, no rational answer can be advanced to explain in a satisfactory manner what, in the end, is the consequences of Cold War inertia and an attachment to the use of the threat of brute force, to assert the primacy of some States over others”.

Mandela recognized that nuclear weapons is an issue of power and privilege. That nuclear weapons are rooted in injustice, inequality, and colonialism. For decades, a handful of nuclear-armed states locked the rest of the world out of their negotiations about our shared future.

But that is changing.

ICAN commends and supports the work of ECOWAS and Member States in their collective efforts to strengthen human security in the region. We are aware of the of the leading role ECOWAS has played in global disarmament issues such as the process leading to the coming into force of the International Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). We are also aware that ECOWAS is a shining example as one of the first regional blocs to adopt a Convention regulating Small Arms and light Weapons other related policies.

Like ECOWAS, we believe that to address disarmament issues, we must focus on the humanitarian impact and work together through international law and multilateralism.

For nuclear weapons, there is now a solution: the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons changes the status quo.

The UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons of 2017 is the first globally applicable multilateral agreement to prohibit nuclear weapons comprehensively. Until then, nuclear weapons were the only weapons of mass destruction not subject to a comprehensive ban, despite their catastrophic, widespread and persistent humanitarian and environmental consequences. The new agreement fills a significant gap in international law.

It prohibits nations from developing, testing, producing, manufacturing, transferring, possessing, stockpiling, using or threatening to use nuclear weapons, or allowing nuclear weapons to be stationed on their territory. It also

prohibits them from assisting, encouraging or inducing anyone to engage in any of these activities.

A State that possesses nuclear weapons may join the Treaty, so long as it agrees to destroy them in accordance with a legally binding, time-bound plan. Similarly, a State that hosts another State's nuclear weapons on its territory may join, so long as it agrees to remove them by a deadline.

The Treaty does not limit the ability of a State to pursue nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

The TPNW came into being because of the strong will of a large group of States that strongly believed in the principles of sovereign equality, peaceful resolution of conflicts, and that such indiscriminate weapons should have no place in the modern world. It was adopted with the support of 122 states, including 42 African states. 12 of the 15 ECOWAS Member-States voted in favor of the treaty, namely: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra-Leone, Togo.

For decades, **African states have taken leadership on nuclear disarmament.**

Africa is a nuclear weapons free zone thanks to the Pelindaba Treaty, which has 41 out of the 52 African countries as states parties. Any state party to the Pelindaba Treaty can join the TPNW without difficulty, as the legal obligations are similar. Both treaties prohibit the development, testing, and possession of nuclear weapons.

The synergy between these two treaties is evident. Progress in implementing one supports implementation in the other. In March 2018, states parties to the Pelindaba Treaty called on AU Member States to "speedily sign and ratify the treaty", emphasizing that this "advances international law in nuclear disarmament and is consistent with the goals of the Treaty of Pelindaba."ⁱⁱⁱ In April 2019, during an African Union Peace and Security Council session on disarmament, AU Commissioner for Peace and Security Ambassador Smail Chergui reminded that now, more than ever, we must re-affirm our commitment to multilateralism in international disarmament and international security more broadly and that under the current global climate, this commitment must be reaffirmed and strengthened through the full adherence to the TPNW.

To date, **21 African states – of which 8 are ECOWAS Members - have signed the TPNW.**¹ ICAN warmly welcomes the courage and

1 Algeria, Angola, Benin, Cabo Verde, Central African Republic, Comoros, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, DR Congo, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Namibia, Nigeria, Sao Tome & Principe, Seychelles, South Africa, and Togo.

commitment shown by each of these states. And in particular, we welcome the leadership of The Gambia and South Africa, who have also already ratified it. We are encouraged to learn that various countries have begun the process of ratification domestically, and we look forward to welcoming more African states as full states parties of this treaty soon.

The TPNW enters into force once 50 states have ratified it; worldwide 23 had done so as of the end of April 2019. With 54 countries and 41 Pelindaba states parties, Africa is in a powerful position to bring this treaty into force and lead the changing legal landscape on nuclear weapons.

Many African States have voiced support for the Treaty and expressed their interest in a regional approach through the African Union and RECs, most notably ECOWAS, towards the pursuit of the prompt entry into force and universalization of the TPNW.

ECOWAS is obviously the strongest regional voice. The **ECOWAS Parliament**, in particular, has a central role to play in encouraging its member-states to take a step to rid the world of Nuclear Weapons and their devastating effects by joining the TPNW.

Honorable Speaker, usually global problems require complex solutions. This particular issue is one of the rare occasions where the solution is in fact quite simple:

ECOWAS member-states have the right and the responsibility to protect Africa and the world from the impact of nuclear weapons, to lead the development of a new legal norm against nuclear weapons, and ensure that their complete elimination is achieved.

It is incumbent on each nation in West Africa to seize control of our own destiny before it's taken from us due to geopolitical events that we had no part in. Each nation can do just that by joining the growing community of nations that are part of the treaty that bans these horrifying weapons that have no military utility.

Around the world, there is a groundswell of support for nuclear disarmament. The people of the world's countries do not want nuclear weapons. We at ICAN work with governments, international organizations and faith-based leaders to promote nuclear disarmament around the world. We work with survivors of the US atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and of nuclear testing, helping share their testimonies with the public and lawmakers. For our major role in drawing attention to the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons and in bringing about the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, ICAN was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for 2017.s

As West Africa Campaigners of ICAN, we call on each state in this region through this August House to sign and or ratify the TPNW to ensure that our people are free from the devastating effects of nuclear weapons. This is the only ways to assert ourselves and our leadership on global disarmament issues based on our unique circumstances. We must refuse to be passive hostage to the Nuclear Umbrella states and the so called ‘Nuclear powers.’

We kindly entreat each of you, as you return to your various National Parliaments to make the TPNW a personal agenda and champion the processes that will eventually lead your country to sign and ratify or accedes to the Treaty. By doing so, each state will make a significant contribution to disarmament and peace.

Honorable Speaker, we understand the issues of priorities and diplomatic relationships and alliances that may make our requests challenging but we also understand that the topmost priority of a nation’s leadership is its citizen and their wellbeing.

By ratifying the treaty, African nations and for that matter West Africa can choose own destiny and make history on the side of reason and humanity.

Thank you.

ⁱ International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW), “Nuclear Famine: climate effects of regional nuclear war”, at: <http://bit.ly/2IOJqxs>.

ⁱⁱ Samia Henni, “Toxic Imprints of Bleu, Blanc, Rouge: France’s Nuclear Bombs in the Algerian Sahara”, *The Funambulist* Vol. 14 (November–December 2017).

ⁱⁱⁱ Conclusions of the 4th Ordinary Session of the Conference of States Parties to the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty (Treaty of Pelindaba), 14–15 March 2018.