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## **Halifax Peace Afternoon Remarks**

**Erin Hunt, Program Manager, Mines Action Canada**

Thank you PeaceBoat for the invitation and thank you all for coming. Like PeaceBoat this is my first visit to Halifax and Mikmaq territory and it's an absolute pleasure to be here.

I think it is especially poignant to be hearing from survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki here in Halifax. Halifax is the only city in North America and maybe the only other city in the world who can begin to understand what it is like to have your city destroyed by a single blast.

As Halifax learned in 1917, response, recovery and rebuilding after such destruction is difficult even without the radiation damage that Hiroshima and Nagasaki faced. The people of Halifax, Hiroshima and Nagasaki have all rebuilt their cities through courage, conviction and collective action.

Those three ingredients, courage, conviction and collective action also were crucial to the negotiation of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and ICAN's Nobel Peace Prize win.

It takes courage to change the world.

Canada knows that cliché is true because we've done it before in the field of disarmament. When Canadian FM Lloyd Axworthy challenged the world to come back to Ottawa in a year to sign a treaty banning landmines he was breaking diplomatic protocol and going so far out on a limb, he might have well been standing on a leaf. Almost every diplomat in the room was horrified and they expressed their unhappiness.

On the civil society side courage had gotten the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) to this point. Campaigners were told they was being unreasonable, unrealistic and hysterical or that they don't understand how things really work. Faced with criticism, exasperation and outright hostility, Axworthy and Canada alongside the ICBL persisted and now over 20 years later the vast majority of the planet agrees with them, landmines have been banned, dozens of countries are completely cleared of landmines and for millions of kids stepping on the playground no longer requires courage.

ICAN and like-minded states were able to draw inspiration from the experience of the ICBL and Canada. Banning landmines took courage because they were a commonly used weapon while nuclear disarmament takes courage because nuclear weapons are shrouded in myth. These myths tell us that nuclear weapons keep us safe, that they are essential for world order and that without them our lives are at risk. These are not facts; we have endowed nuclear weapons with abilities they don't have. All nuclear weapons can do is destroy cities and kill civilians indiscriminately by the 1000s.

You would never hear that weaponized anthrax keeps us safe or that stockpiles of sarin are essential to world order but we have created these myths about nuclear weapons. We created these myths so of course we can destroy them but it takes a lot of courage to speak out against these decades old myths.

The examples of courage in ICAN are breathtaking. Like landmine survivors before them, the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki joined survivors of nuclear weapons testing to share their personal stories again and again in an effort to convince decision makers that nuclear weapons are unacceptable and must be prohibited then eliminated. I don't know if I would have the courage to relive the worst day of my life over and over again but these survivors have found it and more.

But where did all this courage come from?

It came from conviction.

The conviction that no one should ever suffer from these horrific weapons again.

This conviction is at the heart of ICAN's work and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons: due to their humanitarian impact which was just explained to us in vivid detail nuclear weapons must be prohibited then eliminated and because they threaten all of humanity, we all have a role to play in that process - diplomats, parliamentarians, federal, provincial and municipal governments and the general public.

For too many decades, the global conversation about nuclear weapons was something for the experts and most of the time those experts were men with security or military backgrounds. For the majority of the past 70 years the rest of us and our opinions were something to be humoured – maybe – but nuclear disarmament and deterrence was “serious” work for “serious” people and couldn't be tainted with humanity or emotion. Actually discussing what nuclear weapons would do to people was considered a weakness.

Sharing our convictions, talking about what nuclear weapons do to people, bringing evidence to the table broke through diplomatic deadlock. No longer was an in-depth knowledge of warhead yields required to advocate for disarmament. The mere recognition of the global catastrophic humanitarian harm that nuclear weapons could cause is enough to justify any of us speaking out on the issue and taking action.

Collective action allowed us to turn our courage and conviction into real outcomes. ICAN worked closely with a core group of states as well as the United Nations, parliamentarians from around the world and the Red Cross movement throughout the negotiation process and now we are working with the same actors to bring more states on board and to implement the treaty.

Collectively campaigners work nationally, regionally and globally, crossing borders, generations, genders and every other category you can think of. Our campaign is a diverse collection of people with courage and conviction working collectively.

Our diversity was indeed our strength and it resulted in an inclusive treaty that can safely be called feminist. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons has some of the strongest language on gender in a disarmament treaty ever – not only does it recognize that nuclear weapons have different effects on men, women, girls and boys, but also it also promotes the participation of women in the treaty's decision making processes and implementation.

The recognition that nuclear weapons activities have had a disproportionate impact on indigenous peoples in the Treaty's preamble is ground-breaking. This is the first disarmament treaty to recognize the rights of indigenous peoples due to the hard work of Australian, Pacific and American indigenous activists whose land is still contaminated from nuclear weapons tests a half century ago. The impacts of nuclear colonialism continue to be felt and these provisions give voice to marginalized populations who have been excluded by the nuclear deterrence narrative for decades. Acting collectively brought the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons into existence and ensured it was an inclusive and pragmatic step towards the elimination of nuclear weapons.

Previous humanitarian disarmament treaties show that getting the treaty (and even winning a Nobel Peace Prize) is actually the easy part and the hard work comes now.

So what's next and how can Canada and Canadians play a role?

With its long history of leadership on nuclear disarmament, the 2010 unanimous parliamentary motion supporting disarmament and public support, Canada should clearly sign and then ratify this treaty. We belong on the right side of history. Canada's work on the Fissile Material Cut Off Treaty is strengthened by the Treaty on the

Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and vice versa. We need both treaties to reach our collective goal of the elimination of nuclear weapons. The treaty does not require states to leave NATO but it does require work to reduce the importance of nuclear weapons in NATO doctrine. It will take some courage to be the nuclear nag again but Canada has done it once before. It is in line with our convictions, plus we won't be the only voice for disarmament in NATO this time around.

Even before signing and ratifying Canada can contribute to the treaty's implementation. Canada should participate as an observer in all treaty meetings until we join. Before Canada joins and even after we should be focusing on the positive obligations provisions on victim assistance and environmental remediation.

Our feminist international assistance policy can help support victim assistance services or environmental remediation in nuclear weapons affected communities of the South Pacific, Algeria and Kazakhstan.

Canada says it is committed to the rules based international order, to gender equality and to pursuing reconciliation with indigenous peoples. Engaging with the treaty will help us reach these goals and civil society is ready and willing to work with the government on this account.

If the past six months of nuclear grandstanding has taught us anything, there are no safe hands for nuclear weapons so now is the time to take action. Eliminating nuclear weapons is not impossible and Canada can again be a leader in this fight, it just will take some courage, conviction and collective action.