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Remarks to Hope for the Earth on August 6th

Erin Hunt, Mines Action Canada

Thank you so much for the kind invitation to join you today. I am speaking to you from the traditional territory of the Lekwungen people but I recognize that most of you have logged on from land that is the subject of the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Anishinaabe, Mississaguas, Haudenosaunee and allied nations to share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes. In my understanding the Covenant recognized that we share the responsibility of ensuring the shared dish (this territory) is never empty, which includes taking care of the land and the creatures we share it with. The idea that we all eat out of one dish with only one spoon is crucial to the story I want to share today.

This is the story of how ordinary people used hope and courage to do the impossible - to ban the bomb and take humanity one step closer to world without nuclear weapons. You just saw video of an amazing moment in this story but it is not done yet. At Mines Action Canada, we believe that ordinary people can have an extraordinary impact and as a partner organization of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (or ICAN) we have seen that belief brought to life.

The title of today's event "Hope for the Earth" is especially important to this story. Everyone I met in my time campaigning with ICAN was motivated by hope and by simple convictions: nuclear weapons must be prohibited then eliminated due to their humanitarian impact and we all have a role to play in that process.

As we remember the thousands of men, women and children killed and injured in Hiroshima and Nagasaki each one with a name and a story, there is no question that nuclear weapons cause catastrophic humanitarian harm. Regardless of your knowledge of medicine, nuclear physics, arms control, international law or diplomacy, it is easy to see that an indiscriminate weapon whose impacts cannot be contained poses an unacceptable risk to us, the land and the creatures we share it with. If we all eat out of one dish with only one spoon, we should never use or possess a weapon that could contaminate the dish for generations.

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. The opinions of the rest of us ordinary people 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. Banning nuclear weapons seemed impossible.

That sentiment started to shift around 2010 through the work of ICAN and a group of like-minded states who were beginning to speak about the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons. The humanitarian initiative meetings in Oslo in 2013 and Nayarit and Vienna in 2014 really opened up the conversation about nuclear weapons. By the end of the Vienna meeting, the possibility of negotiating a treaty banning nuclear weapons was looking more and more like an achievable goal.

Talking about what nuclear weapons do to people, bringing the evidence to the table was one of the key ways ICAN and the international community was able to break through the diplomatic deadlock. More importantly talking about the humanitarian impact of these abhorrent weapons allowed all of us to have a say. 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. Every person and every state has a stake in nuclear disarmament and we no longer were willing to wait around for the nuclear weapon states to disarm.

At the United Nations General Assembly in 2015, states voted to hold an Open-Ended Working Group on nuclear disarmament and in 2016 the Open-Ended Working Group recommended that the United Nations start negotiating a treaty to prohibit nuclear weapons. At the end of 2016, a majority of the UN General Assembly voted to start negotiations on a treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons. The negotiations started in March 2017 and on July 7, 2017, 122 states adopted a treaty text. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons entered into force on January 22 of this year, as you heard from Setsuko, it was a powerful and hopeful day. The TPNW states parties, now at 55 and growing, are planning a first Meeting of States Parties early next year in Vienna, Austria.

I am worried that quick summary may have made things sound easy, but let me assure you this was not an easy process. These milestones were built on decades of activism by ordinary people who hoped for a safer future.

Having hope is important but you must have the courage to stand up for a better future in the face of opposition. Campaigners faced naysayers in almost every country around the world when they started talking about a new treaty banning nuclear weapons - even here in Canada. The nuclear armed states and their allies were angry. Diplomats supporting the ban treaty were confronted and pressured to not attend the humanitarian initiative meetings, to vote against the start of negotiations and to not attend the negotiations. Ban proponents were accused of undermining the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and of dividing the international community. One particularly memorable example was an informal statement by the United Kingdom that made allusions to the UK and the US causing problems for the NPT if states went ahead with the negotiations and condescendingly disregarded ban states' security concerns related to the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons as not real. Long standing colonial power dynamics were resurrected and used to coerce states. Funding to civil society organizations like ICAN was cut and some former champions of nuclear disarmament, like Canada, went strangely silent.

One of ICAN's videos produced in the lead up to the negotiations reminded viewers that "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 in 1996 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 them.

The examples of courage in ICAN are breathtaking. 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, like Setsuko, have found it and more. Working for decades to prevent others from suffering as they and their families have.

Alongside survivors campaigners worked nationally, regionally and globally, crossing borders, generations, genders and every other possible way to divide humanity. The ICAN delegation at the negotiations included youth as well as the elderly survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, physicians and lawyers, teachers and students, faith leaders and academics, advocates and indigenous peoples – in short ordinary concerned citizens from around the world.

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 Indigenous activists whose land is still contaminated from nuclear weapons tests more than a half century ago. The impacts of nuclear colonialism continue to be felt and these provisions open space for marginalized populations who have been excluded by the nuclear deterrence narrative for decades. Courageous people acting collectively brought the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons from hope to reality and ensured it was an inclusive and pragmatic step towards the elimination of nuclear weapons.

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

With its long history of leadership on humanitarian disarmament, and 74% of Canadians being in support of the TPNW, Canada should clearly join the Treaty. We belong on the right side of history.

The Government often cites our membership in NATO as the reason we cannot join the treaty but the Treaty does not require states to leave NATO. What is required is work to reduce the importance of nuclear weapons in NATO doctrine and for states to opt out of the nuclear part of the alliance. NATO only declared itself a nuclear alliance 11 years ago and different member states have different relationships to nuclear weapons so it isn't actually a problem. It will take some courage though but Canada has been called the nuclear nag before so we can do it again. It is in line with our convictions, plus we won't be the only voice for disarmament in NATO this time around with Spain, Belgium and others seeing strong public and parliamentary support for the TPNW.

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. Until Canada joins the Treaty we should be focusing on the positive obligations provisions in the treaty.

These provisions on victim assistance and environmental remediation in the treaty mean that the treaty is already having an impact.

It is these provisions that offer Canada and Canadians the opportunity to engage meaningfully with the treaty. Canada may not have participated in the negotiations or signed the Treaty yet but there are ways for Canada to contribute to the implementation of the treaty and pursue our foreign policy objectives.

Canada is committed to ensuring gender equality and to pursuing reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. Engaging with the treaty will help us reach these goals.

Our feminist international assistance policy and Canada's work toward the sustainable development goals can help support victim assistance services or environmental remediation in nuclear weapons affected communities of the South Pacific, Algeria and Kazakhstan.

But for Canada to take any of these steps, the government has to hear from Canadians. Tell your Member of Parliament you want to see Canada sign the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and ask them to sign ICAN's Parliamentary Pledge. With a possible election looming, parliamentarians and candidates will be out looking for your vote – tell them you want to see Canada support the TPNW. In this case, your vote gives you extraordinary power to make change. Use it!

You can also call on your city to take a stand. Cities are the targets of nuclear weapons and it would be city first responders who would have to attempt a response if nuclear weapons were ever used again so ask your local government to endorse the ICAN Cities' Appeal as Winnipeg and Pelham Ontario just did. You can learn about both these possible actions on the ICAN website www.icanw.org.

When I started I said I wanted to tell you the story of ordinary people who had an extraordinary impact. Through hope and courage we have been more successful that we dared dream but the story is just getting started and we need you to help us write the next chapter.

Thank you.