

# LEARN ABOUT NUCLEAR WEAPONS

## ***Why do we need a convention?***

“There cannot be one law for the nuclear powers and another law for the non-nuclear powers. By the very principles of law and justice, which the powerful states seek to uphold, the nuclear weapon in any shape or form stands condemned. No policeman can enforce a law which the policeman himself openly violates.” This comment by Judge Christopher Weeramantry expresses the need for an NWC that does not provide different conditions for those possessing nuclear weapons and those who don't. He agrees with many others on the necessity for a convention that would prohibit the development, production, testing, deployment, stockpiling, transfer, threat, or use of nuclear weapons and that offers a phased plan for total elimination of existing arsenals.<sup>1</sup>

A Nuclear Weapons Convention (NWC) will be an international treaty — or framework of treaties — signed by governments. It will be similar to other international treaties banning entire categories of weapons such as the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Biological Weapons Convention and the Mine Ban Treaty. No such treaty exists yet for nuclear weapons, but demands for one have increased in recent years, as have more general demands for complete nuclear disarmament. A convention banning nuclear weapons – the most dangerous weapon type on Earth – should be an obvious step towards securing the survival of the world and its inhabitants.

## ***Defining a convention***

There is no clear-cut definition of an NWC. In the strict sense, an NWC is an international treaty. An NWC will be similar to other international treaties banning entire categories of weapons such as the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Biological Weapons Convention and the Mine Ban Treaty. Treaties to prohibit weapons such as these are achieved through negotiations among states. Generally they prohibit all aspects of development and testing of the weapons, and include measures to prevent the spread of technology and know-how in relation to the weapons, as well as a framework for their elimination. The most effective treaties include a system for verifying that no state party is cheating, including declarations, inspections and technical monitoring, as well as a mechanism for the settlement of disputes and enforcement in case of serious violations.

In a wider sense, the Nuclear Weapons Convention would be the implementation of the universal societal condemnation of nuclear weapons and the codification of the customary norm against all weapons of mass destruction. It would thus include additional national and international measures further delegitimizing nuclear weapons and supporting their prohibition. Its impact will therefore be deeper and more far-reaching than the treaty language itself. Such a treaty would reflect a broader social and political movement away from reliance on weapons of mass destruction and military solutions to conflicts, and would incorporate the desires and responsibilities of global civil society for a less militarized world. It would realize a profound and near universal desire to finally free this

and future generations, human civilization, and the biosphere from the unprecedented and unparalleled threat of nuclear annihilation.<sup>2</sup>

### ***Background***

In April 1997 an international team of scientists, lawyers and disarmament specialists released a Model Nuclear Weapons Convention. This model was submitted by Costa Rica to the United Nations as a discussion draft in November 1997. Many states responded positively to the NWC, but unfortunately some states still refuse to enter into negotiations that could lead to a future NWC.

The responses and developments that followed led to the collaborative publication of 'Securing our Survival: The Case for a Nuclear Weapons Convention', which includes a revised version of the Model NWC, together with comments and discussion on critical political, legal, and technical questions essential to complete nuclear disarmament.

Reflecting the changed security environment since the events of 11 September 2001, the authors conclude that in a world experiencing diverse security challenges and terrorism, nuclear abolition is both an attractive and logical means of reducing and eliminating the dangers of accidents, sabotage.

### ***Securing our Survival***

In the publication "Securing our Survival: The Case for a Nuclear Weapons Convention," experts from the International Association of Lawyers against Nuclear Arms (IALANA), International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW), and the International Network of Engineers and Scientists Against Proliferation (INESAP) examined the conditions for nuclear disarmament in today's security environment.

The Convention outlines a series of five phases for the elimination of nuclear weapons:

- 1) Take nuclear weapons off alert,
- 2) Remove weapons from deployment,
- 3) Remove nuclear warheads from their delivery vehicles,
- 4) Disable the warheads, removing and disfiguring the "pits" and
- 5) Place the fissile material under international control.

In the initial phases, the US and Russia are required to make the deepest cuts in their nuclear arsenals.

You will find the publication, with the revised version of the Model NWC at the website of ICAN (International Campaign for the Abolishment of Nuclear Weapons):  
<http://www.icanw.org/securing-our-survival>

---

1 [http://www.icanw.org/files/SoS/SoS\\_contents\\_foreward.pdf](http://www.icanw.org/files/SoS/SoS_contents_foreward.pdf)

2 [http://www.icanw.org/files/SoS/SoS\\_section1.pdf](http://www.icanw.org/files/SoS/SoS_section1.pdf)