

ICAN address by
Beatrice Fihn, Executive Director
at
5th Conference of State Parties to the Pelindaba Treaty
Midrand, Johannesburg, RSA, 21 October 2021

Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

It is a great honour to be able to join you for the 5th Conference of State Parties to the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty.

This important meeting takes place at a crucial time - on the 25th anniversary of the opening for signature of the Pelindaba Treaty, and a few months ahead of two key international gatherings: the 10th Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the very first Meeting of State Parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Multilateral action on nuclear disarmament has rarely been more necessary or more urgent:

The risk of use of nuclear weapons, whether intentionally or accidentally, is at an all-time high. In the face of such risk, instead of pursuing disarmament, nuclear-armed states are developing more and new types of nuclear weapons systems. Recent reports of possible substantial nuclear warhead increases by China and the United Kingdom are cause for alarm. The proposal for Australia to acquire nuclear-powered submarines would raise the risk of nuclear proliferation, nuclear accidents, and radiological contamination.

Cyber attacks, and the use of artificial intelligence in nuclear systems, increase uncertainty and reduce the time political leaders have to make decisions.



The use of nuclear weapons anywhere would have disastrous consequences everywhere: the destruction, death, climate disruption, famine, and a resulting refugee crisis would ripple throughout Africa and the world, threatening the very survival of humanity.

We increasingly understand that humanity has escaped total catastrophe in the past not because of strategy or deterrence, but in fact by luck. We cannot count on luck to survive in perpetuity .

The Treaty of Pelindaba and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons are the beacons of hope that will guide us out of the darkness of these nuclear dangers.

African countries have a track record as international leaders on nuclear disarmament. Ever since the Declaration on the Denuclearization of Africa in 1964, African states have repeatedly challenged the narrative advanced by nuclear-armed states and called for a world free of nuclear weapons. The Treaty of Pelindaba, a pillar of the African Peace and Security Architecture, is testimony to this leadership.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (or TPNW) - which entered into force in January this year - builds on the Pelindaba Treaty. The TPNW complements and reinforces earlier treaties, including the NPT and the CTBT, and helps transform the regional norms enshrined in Nuclear Weapon Free Zone treaties into global norms.

In light of this synergy between the TPNW and the Treaty of Pelindaba, it is no surprise that African states played a leading role in the negotiation, adoption, and promotion of the TPNW. In 2017, 42 African states voted in favour of the treaty's adoption and since then, 29 African states have signed the treaty and 9 states have ratified it. Yet, all of you have contributed to its creation, its adoption, its entry into force and now towards its universalization. We are grateful for your support.

To State Parties of the Pelindaba and the TPNW: On behalf of ICAN, I would like to thank and congratulate you. You have led the way towards a safer tomorrow.

Yet, our job is not done. Universalizing these two treaties is essential to promote international peace and security and to avoid a nuclear catastrophe. We cannot rest until every African state has joined the Pelindaba Treaty and every country in the world has joined the TPNW.

Each State Party must encourage States not party to sign, ratify or accede to the TPNW and the Pelindaba Treaty, with a goal of universal adherence.

Progress in implementing and universalizing one treaty supports implementation and universalization in the other.

Each new signature, and each new ratification, strengthens the norm against the use and possession of nuclear weapons into a global norm that will lead to a world free of nuclear weapons.

Each new signature, and each new ratification, contributes to rejecting the notion that these weapons are acceptable for some and not for others.

Each new signature, and each new ratification, makes it more difficult for arms companies to acquire funds to build and maintain illegal weapons. Many major banks and financial institutions have already begun divesting to comply with the new international law now imposed by the TPNW.

As more states become parties to these treaties, the pressure on these companies to cease production, and the pressure on nuclear-armed states to disarm, will grow stronger.

To signatories and other supporters: do not wait to become a party to these historic treaties! It is now time to translate the firm, principled position that brings us together here today into action to universalise the TPNW and the Pelindaba Treaty. Every state that joins these essential disarmament agreements moves us closer to the total elimination of nuclear weapons.



Universalizing these treaties will help to strengthen peace and security in Africa and beyond. African adherence to the TPNW is an important step towards preventing the catastrophic humanitarian consequences that the use of nuclear weapons would have on the African continent and rendering these horrific weapons a relic of the past.

Given the role Africa has played to date for the TPNW, we believe it is essential that African nations participate fully at the **first Meeting of State Parties** of the TPNW, which will take place in Vienna in March 2022.

To those of you who have already joined the TPNW: we encourage you to attend the first Meeting of States Parties and participate actively.

To those of you who have not yet joined the TPNW: in order to participate fully at the first Meeting of States Parties, you must deposit your country's instrument of accession or ratification with the United Nations as soon as possible, and in any event no later than 22 December 2021.

Time is short, but ICAN stands ready to assist you. Some of ICAN's partners are in the room today. Please reach out.

ICAN is proud to stand with African nations and institutions in this work, for which we were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2017 – and as such this Prize also belongs to all the leaders in government and civil society in this region. Thank you.