



## **International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War submission to Alþingi inquiry into resolution 57/149, “Bann við kjarnorkuvopnum”**

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### **Contact**

Erica Eustis

IPPNW

Mobile +1 (503) 777-2794

[eeustis@ippnw.org](mailto:eeustis@ippnw.org)

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### **Introduction**

International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) is pleased to make the following submission to the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Icelandic parliament (Alþingi) in support of resolution 193/148 “Bann við kjarnorkuvopnum” (“Prohibition of nuclear weapons”).

IPPNW is a non-partisan federation of national medical groups in 66 countries, representing tens of thousands of doctors, medical students, other health workers, and concerned citizens who share the common goal of creating a more peaceful and secure world freed from the threat of nuclear annihilation. IPPNW was awarded the 1985 Nobel Peace Prize for “spreading authoritative information and by creating an awareness of the catastrophic consequences of atomic warfare”<sup>1</sup>.

### **Background**

Nuclear weapons pose the greatest immediate threat to the existence of humankind. Studies have demonstrated that even a single nuclear detonation will have devastating consequences on humanity and the environment. Yet, nuclear weapons are the only weapons of mass destruction not subject to a comprehensive prohibition.

On July 7th, 2017, a historic step toward banning and eliminating nuclear weapons was taken when the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) was approved by a vote of

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<sup>1</sup> International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War – Facts. (2019). NobelPrize.org. Tue. Retrieved from <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1985/physicians/facts/>

122-1-1 at the United Nations. The TPNW “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”<sup>2</sup>. The TPNW is the most important document in nuclear disarmament since the end of the Cold War.

As of 11 March, 2019, 70 states have signed the TPNW and 22 states have become parties to it.

## **Humanitarian and Environmental Consequences of Nuclear War**

### **1. Mass destruction**

Nuclear weapons are capable of causing widespread, instantaneous death and destruction. Even a single nuclear detonation will have devastating humanitarian and environmental consequences. One nuclear bomb can destroy an entire city, with blast, firestorms, and radiation immediately killing hundreds of thousands of people<sup>3</sup>. Even a very limited nuclear war with modern-day weapons could cause more fatalities in one day than in all of World War II<sup>4</sup>.

### **2. Ionizing radiation**

After the initial explosion, the ionizing radiation released by nuclear weapons would cause further devastation. Exposure to the radiation can cause death, long-term illnesses, and genetic disruptions<sup>5</sup>. Acute radiation sickness can cause a person to die within a matter of days. Lower amounts of radiation exposure cause many types of deadly cancers, as well as birth defects in future generations<sup>6</sup>.

### **3. Nuclear famine**

The use of nuclear weapons on urban industrial areas would inject large quantities of soot into Earth’s atmosphere, potentially causing worldwide climate disruption and a catastrophic decline in food production<sup>7</sup>. A war involving less than one percent of the total nuclear weapons in existence today would cause a nuclear famine that would put two billion people at risk, and end civilization as we know it. Large nuclear arsenals, such as those in the United States and Russia, are capable of producing enough smoke and soot to cause a nuclear winter, with global temperatures dropping to levels not seen since the last ice age. Under these conditions ecosystems would collapse and we might become extinct as a species<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (full text) (July 2017). <https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/nuclear/tpnw/>

<sup>3</sup> IPPNW campaign kit: Banning Nuclear Weapons: The Humanitarian Facts. (n.d.). Retrieved from: <https://hinwcampaignkit.org/>

<sup>4</sup> International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, World Medical Association, World Federation of Public Health Associations, International Council of Nurses. (May 2016). The health and humanitarian case for banning and eliminating nuclear weapons. Retrieved from: <https://ippnw.org/pdf/2016-working-paper.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> IPPNW campaign kit: Banning Nuclear Weapons: The Humanitarian Facts. (n.d.). Retrieved from: <https://hinwcampaignkit.org/>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, World Medical Association, World Federation of Public Health Associations, International Council of Nurses. (May 2016). The health and humanitarian case for banning and eliminating nuclear weapons. Retrieved from: <https://ippnw.org/pdf/2016-working-paper.pdf>

## **Increasing Nuclear Threat**

The total number of nuclear weapons in the world today is nearly 15,000<sup>9</sup>. In the United States and Russia, almost 1,800 of these nuclear weapons are on high-alert status, meaning they can be launched within a matter of minutes<sup>10</sup>. With nuclear weapons states modernizing their weaponry and withdrawing from previous nuclear weapons agreements, non-nuclear weapons states have taken a stand through the TPNW to resist this potentially catastrophic drift toward greater nuclear weapons confrontation.

## **Conclusion**

The only way to prevent the devastating consequences of nuclear war is to eliminate nuclear weapons. By joining the TPNW, Iceland will be joining other countries, including some like New Zealand and Thailand with ongoing military alliances with nuclear weapons states, in taking an important step toward a safer world for all of humankind.

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<sup>9</sup> Status of World Forces. (February 2019). Federation of American Scientists.

<sup>10</sup> International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, World Medical Association, World Federation of Public Health Associations, International Council of Nurses. (May 2016). The health and humanitarian case for banning and eliminating nuclear weapons. Retrieved from: <https://ipprnw.org/pdf/2016-working-paper.pdf>