

OpEd: A Big Step Toward Eliminating Nuclear Weapons

Timmon Wallis and Vicki Elson, NuclearBan.US

January 22, 2021: Around the world, activists are joining with governments to celebrate today's milestone in the struggle to abolish all nuclear weapons from the face of the earth forever. We may yet eliminate these weapons of mass destruction before they eliminate us.

Today, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons enters into force as law in the first 50 ratifying countries, with many more countries expected to join soon. The nine nuclear-armed nations, US, Russia, UK, France, China, Israel, India, Pakistan, and North Korea, are not among them, but this Treaty will soon make it harder for them to continue with business as usual when it comes to nuclear weapons.

It's *never* been legal to *use or threaten to use* nuclear weapons against cities or civilian populations. But now it's *also* illegal to develop, test, produce, manufacture, transfer, station, possess, or stockpile nuclear weapons. Significantly, under this treaty, it's also illegal to "assist, encourage, or induce" anyone else to do any of those things. That includes financing them, at least for some of the countries that join the Treaty.

One reason that nuclear weapons still exist is because they're extremely profitable for a couple dozen very large defense contractors. They keep getting those contracts because they keep financing our politicians in Washington. It's that simple.

But investors, concerned with "legislative risk" posed by the Treaty (not to mention the ethical and reputational burden of supporting this industry), are already jumping ship. Two of the five largest pension funds in the world have divested from nuclear weapons. The City of New York is expected to divest its pension funds in the near future. Right here, the City of Northampton has divested too, and is refusing to award city contracts with any of these companies.

The profiteers and the politicians continually try to convince us that these mad machines keep us "safe." But this Treaty expresses international rejection of "deterrence theory." It stigmatizes nuclear weapons as a grave danger to all humanity. It lays the groundwork for sensible, fair multilateral disarmament to eliminate all nuclear weapons from all countries. It's worth noting that the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) won the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize for its role in facilitating the Treaty.

The profiteers' activities will soon become illegal in increasing numbers of countries where they have offices, projects, suppliers or investors. If they're smart, they'll convert their scientists and facilities to green technologies that address climate change and other pressing social needs.

In the US, activists are celebrating this international pressure, and adding to it with federal, state, and city level legislation, divestment campaigns, and public education. They are urging their legislators to sign the ICAN Pledge to support the Treaty. Learn more at NuclearBan.US, DontBankOnTheBomb.com, and ICANW.org.