

United Nations Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

Christian Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament briefing



Introduction

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (also known as the Ban Treaty) will enter into force on 21 January 2021. It was agreed by the United Nations in July 2017 following negotiations by UN Member States. Since then 84 states have signed the Treaty and 50 have ratified, with Honduras being the 50th to do so, on Saturday 24 October.

The Treaty was the result of years of campaigning on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons for which the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2017. Christian CND is a proud ICAN Partner and works closely with the group in the UK.

Regrettably, the United Kingdom, along with the other nuclear-armed states, boycotted the negotiations that led to the Treaty and have failed to engage with it in any way. There have been repeated calls from leaders of non nuclear-armed states for engagement and recently Pope Francis has become the first Pope to condemn not only the use of nuclear weapons but also the “threat of their use, as well as their very possession”.

What’s included in the treaty

A comprehensive ban on nuclear weapons and other related activity. This includes:

- A ban on the use, stockpiling, testing, production, manufacture, stationing and installation.
- A ban on assisting with the prohibited acts, such as the United States leasing the Trident missiles to the UK.
- A ban on allowing nuclear weapons to travel through territorial waters or airspace.
- The requirement of assistance to the victims of nuclear weapons. This is the first time this has been included in a treaty.
- A requirement to take action in areas that have been damaged by the testing of nuclear weapons.
- All signatories are required to encourage other states to sign up to the treaty.

And crucially for the UK there is a clear mechanism for nuclear-armed states to sign up. It does not require them to disarm immediately but to enter into negotiations on a time scale for the destruction of their stockpiles.

Christian CND activity

Christian CND has been part of the movement campaigning for a global nuclear weapons ban for decades. Work we have undertaken in support of the current initiative includes:

- Attending the talks - Christian CND representatives travelled to New York for talks to take part in the international lobbying efforts.
- Meeting embassy officials – Every March we hold an Embassies Walk in London to talk to diplomats about issues around nuclear weapons. In recent years we have visited NATO Member States and those who have signed the Treaty.
- Working with partners – we continue to be active members of ICAN, regularly sharing ideas and developments with colleagues in the UK and around Europe.
- Praying - we have been regularly calling on God to move on this issue, praying throughout the negotiations as leaders talk about these vital issues.
- Working with the Churches – we had a fringe event during the Church of England Synod where a motion in support of the Ban Treaty was passed and we have coordinated other interdenominational efforts in support of the Treaty.

The positions of the UK Churches

Many Christian traditions and denominations in the UK supported the Ban Treaty before it was even agreed. The Baptist Church, Church of Scotland, Methodist Church, United Reformed Church and Quakers have long-standing positions opposing nuclear weapons and have welcomed the Ban Treaty. The Church of England passed a motion in 2018 calling for the Government to “respond positively” to the Treaty. Many individual clergy members within the Catholic church are also supportive of the Treaty.

What can you do?

While the UK government appears to be entrenched in opposition to the treaty, history demonstrates the difference that active campaigning can make. There are a number of things you can do to support the campaign and make sure that your voice is heard.

- Speak to others about the ban - people may be unaware of the most recent developments. With the lack of coverage in the national media the best way to spread the word is through networks. Tell those in your church the good news. If you are in an Anglican church, why not mention the General Synod motion.
- Contact your MP - even some MPs are unaware of the ban, and it is a great opportunity to engage with those who say they believe in multilateral disarmament, especially those recently elected. There is a tool on the CND website you can use to contact your MP.
- Pray - while we believe in the effectiveness of campaigning, God can do miracles and we need to call out to Him for intervention in this. There are some pointers below which you may find useful.

Prayer points

The Entry into Force of the Treaty is a time for great celebration and to give thanks to God, not only for the states that have decided to join the Treaty but also for the campaigners around the world who have been working tirelessly to bring this day to pass. While we rejoice, we also rededicate ourselves to working for the ultimate goal of global nuclear abolition.

Please join us as we seek God for:

- Our political leaders – 1 Timothy 2:2 exhorts us to pray for those in authority. As our political leaders face uncertain times and consider how to react, please pray for them and their decisions.
- Wisdom – James 3:11 says that ‘the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving’. Pray that our leaders make wise choices when considering their response to the ban.
- Peace – 1 Peter 3:11 calls on us to ‘seek peace and pursue it’. At a time when peace can seem far away, the ban treaty gives a chance to achieve lasting peace for the future.
- Co-operation – Psalm 133 speaks of the joy of God’s people living in unity. Pray that the global Christian community will come together to seek peace.

Can you support Christian CND?

This is a vital time in the campaign for a world of peace, free of nuclear weapons. Christian CND is committed to campaigning in support of the ban, but our work costs money. Please consider supporting our work through a regular donation and encouraging others to become members.

Further reading available on ChristianCND.org.uk/Links

Christian CND - Christians working and praying for a nuclear weapons-free world

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