



# Sustainable Development Goals and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

UN Civil Society Conference | August 2019

While nuclear weapons are not explicitly included in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), any use of such weapons - whether by design or accident - would have devastating, catastrophic consequences on our health, societies, and environment. Nuclear weapons are thus incompatible with the SDGs.

The deep concern expressed by some governments, the international Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, various United Nations agencies, and non-government organizations about the catastrophic harm caused by nuclear weapons became a foundation of what has become known as the Humanitarian Initiative, a major driving force behind the processes that led to the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) in 2017. The Humanitarian Initiative resonates with the vision of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Additionally, resources used to produce, develop and modernize nuclear weapons could be used to support initiatives that promote and advance the SDGs.

Below summarizes the threat that nuclear weapons pose to the implementation of the SDGs, and how the TPNW addresses those concerns.

## How would nuclear weapons affect the implementation of the SDGs?



Even a limited, regional nuclear war would cause significant climate disruption worldwide (**Goal 13**), posing a significant impact on the global food production (**Goal 2**). A study by the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War in 2013 estimated that more than 2 billion people could be affected by this “nuclear famine.”<sup>1</sup>



In addition to the long-lasting impacts of radiation in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, there are numerous reports of hazardous contamination at nuclear weapons production facilities and testing sites. Thus any use, production or testing of nuclear weapons threaten the achievement of **Goal 3**, and in particular Target 3.9: *By 2030, substantially reduce the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals and air, water and soil pollution and contamination.*



According to the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), “The death toll from a nuclear attack against a large city today could be measured in the millions rather than the tens or hundreds of thousands.”<sup>2</sup> The International Committee of the Red Cross warns of the lack of adequate humanitarian response capacity in the immediate aftermath of a nuclear weapons detonation in a populated area. Such concerns impede the realization of **Goal 11**.

These are just a handful of examples of how the world’s reliance on nuclear weapons threaten the progress toward and achievement of the SDGs.

## How could the TPNW help advance the SDGs?

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) is the first legally binding international agreement to comprehensively prohibit nuclear weapons. The Treaty will enter into legal force once 50 nations have signed and ratified it. It opened for signature in September 2017, and as of August 15, 2019, there are 70 signatories and 25 states parties. The TPNW’s core prohibitions (including prohibitions on production, transfer, stockpiling, testing and use) supports a number of SDGs by prohibiting nuclear weapons and the related activities that would pose negative impacts to health, environ-

1 Ira Helfand. 2013. *Nuclear Famine: Two Billion People at Risk?* Malden, MA: International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War.

2 International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons. “The radioactive incineration of cities.” <http://www.icanw.org/the-facts/catastrophic-harm/the-radioactive-incineration-of-cities/>.



ment and economy, including those mentioned above.

Additionally, the TPNW has some provisions that advance specific SDGs. For example...



The Preamble of the TPNW recognizes the importance of peace and disarmament education and expresses the commitment “to the dissemination of the principles and norms of this Treaty.” This directly impacts **Goal 4** and particularly Target 4.7: *By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including education for... promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence....*



Related to **Goal 5**, the Preamble of the TPNW notes that nuclear weapons have “a disproportionate impact on women and girls”, and that “equal, full and effective participation of both women and men is an essential factor for the promotion and attainment of sustainable peace and security”.

Additionally, Article 6 on Victim assistance and environmental remediation states that “Each State Party shall, with respect to individuals under its jurisdiction who are affected by the use or testing of nuclear weapons... adequately provide age- and gender-sensitive assistance...” This is the first time there are global legal provisions for assistance to victims of nuclear weapons use and testing.



Article 6 of the TPNW also has direct impact on **Goal 16**, “by filling the legal gap in regards to nuclear weapons and by promoting the rights of those affected.”<sup>3</sup> The Treaty particularly contributes to Target 16.1: Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere.

## What can cities do?

Many cities and municipalities around the world are speaking up against the threat of nuclear weapons and expressing their support of the TPNW through various initiatives:

- ICAN Cities Appeal: <http://nuclearban.org/cities>
- Back from the Brink: <https://www.preventnuclearwar.org/>
- NuclearBan.US: <http://www.nuclearban.us/>
- Don't Bank on the Bomb: <https://www.dontbankonthebomb.com/city-guide/>
- Mayors for Peace: <http://www.mayorsforpeace.org/english/>

## Resources on nuclear weapons, disarmament and SDGs:

- Borrie, J. et al. 2016. *Gender, development and nuclear weapons: Shared goals, shared concerns*. International Law and Policy Institute and United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research.
- Hunt, Erin. 2018. “Sustaining Destruction: Nuclear Weapons and the Sustainable Development Goals.” *Impakter*, June 25, 2018. <https://impakter.com/sustaining-destruction-nuclear-weapons-sustainable-development-goals>.
- International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons. “The Facts: Catastrophic Harm”: <https://www.icanw.org/the-facts/catastrophic-harm/>.
- UN News. 2018. “UN chief launches new disarmament agenda ‘to secure our world and our future.’” May 24, 2018. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/05/1010551>.

3 Erin Hunt. 2018. “Sustaining Destruction: Nuclear Weapons and the Sustainable Development Goals.” *Impakter*: <https://impakter.com/sustaining-destruction-nuclear-weapons-sustainable-development-goals>.