

# **African Regional Seminar on the Universalization of the TPNW**

*30-31 January 2023*

## **ICRC Opening Statement**

His Excellency, Alvin Botes, Deputy Minister of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation of the Government of the Republic of South Africa,  
Ms. Beatrice Fihn, Executive Director, ICAN,  
Excellencies, Government representatives and experts from across Africa,  
Representatives of the African Union and Southern African Development Community,  
Members of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation,  
Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen. Good morning to you all.

On behalf of the ICRC, I warmly welcome all of you attending this important event today.

Nuclear weapons are one of the biggest threats to humanity. Their catastrophic humanitarian consequences for all life on our planet are today well-known, and so are the immense risks their continued existence entails. The complete elimination of nuclear weapons is an urgent humanitarian imperative, and for all those States that are party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty - which many of you in this room are – it is also a legal duty.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons for the first time prohibits nuclear weapons on a global scale, meaning not limited to one region or another. The history of regulation of other weapons of mass destruction has shown that the prohibition of a weapon is a first necessary step to their elimination. Of course, as every treaty, the TPNW can only bind its States Parties. It is therefore of paramount importance that as many members of the international community as possible join the treaty without delay. The larger the membership, the stronger the treaty's legal and political force.

Africa's role in the entry into force of the TPNW cannot be overstated. African States actively participated in negotiations on the TPNW, standing together as a regional bloc to call for a prohibition on nuclear weapons. On 7 July 2017, 42 African States voted in favour of the adoption of the TPNW, reaffirming the continent's unequivocal commitment to a world free of these weapons. To-date, 15 African States have ratified the Treaty and another 18 have signed it. Now, African States can and must advance the implementation of the objectives of the TPNW by contributing to its universalization.

Since 1945, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has been calling for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons. The ICRC and the Japanese Red Cross witnessed first-hand the unspeakable suffering caused by the atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, while attempting to bring relief to the dying and injured.

The entry into force of the TPNW is the beginning, not the end, of our efforts. These efforts are more necessary than ever in the face of recent developments, as the adoption of more aggressive nuclear

weapons doctrines, threats of use of nuclear weapons, and the continued modernization of nuclear arsenals all point towards an increasing risk of use.

It is important to remember that the principles and rules of International Humanitarian Law apply to nuclear weapons. The ICRC's legal analysis and the new evidence and data on the catastrophic direct and indirect effects of a nuclear detonation on the life and health of individuals and on the environment point to a clear conclusion: it is extremely doubtful that nuclear weapons could ever be used in an armed conflict in accordance with the principles and rules of IHL. Joining the TPNW is therefore essentially also a meaningful way of promoting compliance with IHL.

As you will discuss more during this Seminar, the TPNW is an intrinsic part of the broader nuclear disarmament architecture – along with the NPT, the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and the regional treaties establishing zones free from weapons of mass-destruction – which it complements and reinforces. In Africa, this includes the African Nuclear Weapon Free Zone Treaty, or Pelindaba Treaty, which establishes the African continent as a region free of nuclear weapons, and which has to date been ratified by 41 African States and signed by an additional 10 African States.

The TPNW, for the most part, goes beyond such existing instruments, by prohibiting outright the use of nuclear weapons and by foreseeing measures to redress the harm caused by nuclear weapon use and testing on people and the environment. The first meeting of States parties to the TPNW which took place in June of last year adopted a strong political declaration and an ambitious action plan that will frame the implementation of the treaty in the coming years.

I would like to congratulate South Africa for co-chairing the treaty's working group on universalization. As States parties to the TPNW agreed, universalization has two aspects: a tangible one, which is of course the treaty's membership, but also an intangible one, which is about bringing and keeping the treaty's main messages at the heart of nuclear disarmament debates: the catastrophic consequences of any nuclear weapon use, the unacceptable risks of a deliberate or accidental detonation, and the legal, moral and ethical incompatibility of these horrific weapons of mass destruction.

We call on you, African States, to contribute to both these aspects of universalization. Joining the TPNW means:

- strengthening the taboo against nuclear weapons
- furthering the object and purpose of the Pelindaba treaty
- implementing the NPT's long-neglected article VI, which calls for effective measures on nuclear disarmament
- promoting respect for and compliance with IHL
- and, ultimately, safeguarding humanity's common future.

The ICRC strongly encourages all States that have not yet done so to ratify or adhere to the TPNW without delay. We stand ready to support you at every step of at every step of this process.

I thank you.