

2017 Nobel Peace Prize Awarded to the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN)

The Norwegian Nobel Committee awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for 2017 to the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN). The organization received the award for its work to draw attention to the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons and for its ground-breaking efforts to achieve a treaty-based prohibition of such weapons.

Through binding international agreements, the international community has previously adopted prohibitions against land mines, cluster munitions and biological and chemical weapons. Nuclear weapons are even more destructive, but have not yet been made the object of a similar international legal prohibition. Through its work, ICAN has helped to fill this legal gap to a great extent.

ICAN is a coalition of non-governmental organizations from around 100 different countries around the globe. The coalition has been a driving force in prevailing upon the world's nations to pledge to cooperate with all relevant stakeholders in efforts to stigmatize, prohibit and eliminate nuclear weapons. To date, 108 states have made such a commitment, known as the Humanitarian Pledge. ICAN has been the leading civil society actor in the endeavor to achieve a prohibition of nuclear weapons under international law. On 7 July 2017, 122 of the UN member states acceded to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

It is, however, important to note here that none of the nuclear weapons nations had participated in the talks leading up to the nuclear ban treaty. Overall, 69 countries had kept off – most of whom included Asian and European countries who are under Washington's nuclear umbrella. The UK, US and France said in a joint statement after the UNGA adopted the new treaty on July 7 that “[They did] not intend to sign, ratify or ever become party to it. Therefore, there will be no change in the legal obligations on [their] countries with respect to nuclear weapons”.

The Norwegian Nobel Committee was aware that an international legal prohibition could not in itself eliminate nuclear weapons, and that so far neither the States that already have nuclear weapons nor their closest allies support the nuclear weapon ban treaty. The Committee further emphasized that the next steps towards attaining a world free of nuclear weapons must involve the nuclear-armed States. This year's Peace Prize is therefore also a call upon these States to initiate serious negotiations with a view to the gradual, balanced and carefully monitored elimination of the almost 15,000 nuclear weapons in the world.