

19th IPPNW World Congress Basel
Final plenary remarks - Tilman Ruff

I have the honour to chair the ICAN Working Group; and thank Andi and Claudio and all their colleagues for the privilege of being invited to give the final plenary presentation of this magnificent congress.

The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons – ICAN – was established at the 2006 IPPNW congress in Helsinki. Through the work of many of you, has achieved a good deal in the past 4 years. ICAN embodies and takes forward the essential core, unfulfilled mission for which IPPNW was established 30 years ago. I believe that with our united efforts and those of our many partners, we can seize a historic opportunity to make a decisive difference towards abolishing nuclear weapons.

ICAN was born out the inspiration of the remarkable success of the ICBL, through civil society and international organisation partnership with initially a very few visionary governments, which in several years delivered the Ottawa treaty. It was also born out dismay and alarm at the complete failure of the 2005 NPT Review Conference and the World Summit of over 100 heads of state which followed to agree anything towards eradicating nuclear weapons, in the face of growing nuclear dangers. We were convinced that a new approach was needed, and incremental business as usual a recipe for an inexorable slide to nuclear catastrophe. It was Ron McCoy who first proposed ICAN.

ICAN is not an organisation but a campaign – lean, focussed, adaptable, open, inclusive and networked. It offers a coordinated focus for education, engagement and mobilisation of civil society for the abolition of nuclear weapons through a global treaty. We want nuclear weapons to be outlawed and eliminated not 'in some century', but in our lifetime. We want multilateral negotiations on a NWC or other global abolition treaty to be underway no later than 2015. We do not see merit in being too prescriptive or rigid about exactly how a global ban on nuclear weapons should be developed. What we want to do is put heat under decision makers to encourage and compel them to act. We want to encourage and work closely with those governments that will take the lead.

As Albert Einstein said: "There is no secret and there is no defense; there is no possibility of control except through the aroused understanding and insistence of the peoples of the world."

Over the past 4 years since Helsinki there have been important achievements through ICAN.

- The model NWC was updated, re-published and promoted. It is widely regarded as the most thoughtful and detailed effort to define all the key elements of the legal agreements needed to achieve and sustain a world freed from nuclear weapons and how they might fit together. It clearly demonstrates that abolition can be achieved. It is promoted by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon.

- Internationally and in some countries, we have build partnerships with many, diverse organisations. More than 200 internaitonal organisations have become partners in ICAN. Mayors for Peace was the first. In Norway, more than 40 organisations have become ICAN partners. In Australia, our 60 partners include all the major environment organisations, churches, trade unions, professional and women's associations, indigenious organisations, political parties, the UN Association and Oxfam. We believe that great strength lies in coordinated and consistent priorities and messages among as many diverse civil society partners as possible. And a key part of multiplying our efforts is to convince organisations who do not have nuclear weapons at the core of their work that advocating nuclear weapons abolition is something they should do.
Because nuclear weapons threaten everyone and everything – they are the ultimate humanitarian, faith, human rights, sustainability, social justice, development, ethical and environmental issue. There is great scope to expand the number and range of our partners and their engagement in more places.

- We were able to convince the International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament from being extremely negative about a NWC to seeing it as the most logical and practical way to achieve both disarmament and non-proliferation; and similarly convince a number of political parties and former heads of state.

- But I think the most telling measure that the time is right for ICAN and for going all out now is, as Rebecca has explained, what happened at the NPT Review Conference in May, where the NWC came in from the cold, from the political fringe to firmly in the mainstream. Talk may be cheap, and if pious words alone could abolish nuclear weapons the job would have been finished long ago, but an unprecedented majority, 140 of the world's governments expressing support for a nuclear weapons abolition treaty is a significant shift.

This provides a vital platform to now move beyond the ineffectual and moribund NPT to what can do the job: a comprehensive, binding, phased, verifiable, global nuclear abolition treaty. It means we need to work fast and hard to build civil society pressure for action, and work more strategically in sustained and close partnership to support and encourage those governments that will or can be convinced to take the lead on a nuclear weapons ban. While all governments have a responsibility to act and are appropriate targets for advocacy, the ICAN Working Group felt that key governments for our efforts include those of Austria, Norway and Switzerland, Germany, Egypt, Nigeria and South Africa, Chile, India, Indonesia, Japan, and Russia.

I'd like now to suggest and commend to you all some key priorities for work needed on IPPNW's core mission of nuclear weapons abolition when you return home from this congress.

First, pressure your government to support a NWC, and get your country's political leaders and diplomats cracking on working with other governments on early commencement of negotiations on a global abolition treaty. Meet officials as high up as possible, and visit them again, and again. Write to them. Invite them to speak on nuclear weapons abolition. Urge them to establish parliamentary inquiries into how their government can best work for nuclear weapons abolition.

Second, encourage and assist diverse civil society organisations to support nuclear weapons abolition through a binding treaty. Doctors and other health professionals enjoy wide respect and have convening power to bring others together, and often have easier access to political leaders than others. Use it. Invite other organisations to join delegations, roundtables, events. Speak at their conferences. Use ICAN materials, the NWIP materials, the SLMK's Learn About Nuclear Weapons.

Recently president of the International Committee of the Red Cross Jakob Kellenberger signalled that the Red Cross movement is now giving priority to making the humanitarian case against nuclear weapons. This important and extremely welcome commitment is beginning to be embraced by national Red Cross societies around the world. Senior Red Cross staff have been active participants in this congress. There is now a wonderful opportunity for IPPNW and other ICAN partners to contact their Red Cross/Red Crescent/Red Diamond national society, congratulate them on this development, and explore working with them to build awareness of the humanitarian case against nuclear weapons. Offer to give their staff a presentation on the medical dimensions of nuclear weapons production and possession and consequences of nuclear explosions.

Third, urge your national medical or student association to pass a resolution calling for the speedy removal of highly enriched uranium – directly usable in the simplest kind of nuclear weapons most attractive to non-state groups – from the production of medical isotopes. Urge your hospital or nuclear medicine service to preferentially source their isotopes from a provider who does not use HEU.

Fourth, use the MillionPleas campaign as a way to engage with civil society organisations, schools, prominent individuals and the mass media. We were fortunate to partner with a large international advertising agency, TBWA, to harness pro-bono a little of the enormous resources of the advertising industry and its ability to reach vast numbers of people. This campaign was launched on the 65th anniversary of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki nuclear bombings. It aims to utilise the web and social e-media to create the world's longest video chain letter, with individual faces and voices, calling for nuclear weapons abolition. It is a way to connect people with a simple means join others all over the world to show their support for a global abolition treaty, and to learn more about what they can do. I'd like to show you a 60 sec TV commercial introducing MillionPleas.

DVD HERE

Negotiations on a nuclear weapons abolition treaty should begin, now. They should be continued without interruption until a global treaty to eliminate and outlaw nuclear weapons is concluded. As for chemical and biological weapons, landmines and cluster munitions, abolition of nuclear weapons requires a

comprehensive, equitable treaty enshrining one standard for all – zero nuclear weapons.

There is now a historic opportunity for leaders of courage and vision to craft a negotiating process for a nuclear weapons abolition treaty. We need to make leaders feel the heat that they must grasp the nettle. Through leadership and ICAN partnerships we can greatly multiply our collective efforts and help build a united, irresistible chorus of voices of people around our earth.

The World Health Assembly in 1983 concluded that nuclear weapons constitute the greatest immediate threat to the health and welfare of humankind. This threat is not only to humans, but the very capacity of our earth to support complex life is in jeopardy. The medical prescription is clear: negotiating a nuclear weapons abolition treaty is the most urgent priority for global health.

I'd like to finish with part of the official memorandum of conversation between President Ronald Reagan and General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev at their summit meeting in Reykjavik, Iceland, on 12 October 1986, when, for a moment, they appeared to have agreed to the elimination of all their nuclear weapons within ten years.

“Ten years from now, [President Reagan] would be a very old man. He and Gorbachev would come to Iceland and each of them would bring the last nuclear missile from each country with them. And they would give a tremendous party for the whole world ... He would be very old by then, and Gorbachev would not recognise him. The President would say, 'Hello Mikhail.' And Gorbachev would say, 'Ron, is it you?' And then they would destroy the last missiles.”

I can, you can, we can abolish nuclear weapons.

Thank you.