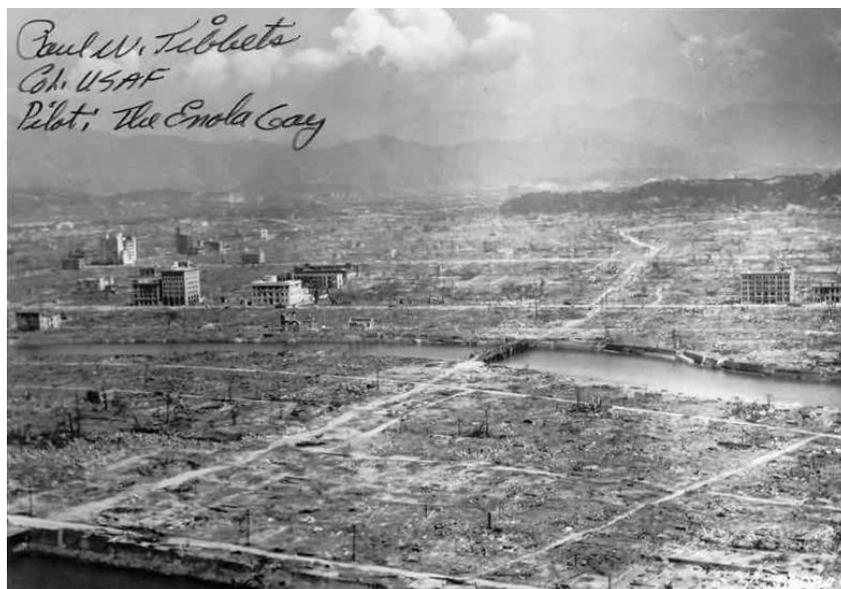


ICAN and a Nuclear Free Future

By Morgan Jackson, HOPE researcher Qld

Ever since their initial development in the 30s and 40s, nuclear weapons have been a force to be reckoned with, and something to be afraid of. As World War II intensified and it became clear that neither side was stronger or more capable than the other, world leaders began to look for an advantage. Small beginnings in physics labs turned into industrial scale development at the Manhattan Project, and the Allies – America in particular – realised that a bomb of this strength, with this kind of destructive force, would very quickly turn the tide in their favour.

By 1945, after years of development and testing, the Manhattan Project created the first nuclear bombs that would be used on an enemy target. The War was wrapping up in Europe, but animosity between America and Japan raged on in the Pacific. In a show of strength and a threat of what was to come, President Truman ordered two nuclear weapons to be deployed over the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The result was catastrophically devastating. Both cities were levelled completely, at least one hundred thousand Japanese civilians and military personnel were killed outright, and tens of thousands died later due to related radiation illnesses, the effects of which lasted for generations. Truman promised that this was a sign of things to come, and Japan surrendered.



World War II was over, but the world wasn't done with nuclear weapons. After seeing the incredibly devastating power they provided, the following decades were defined by other world powers' attempts to develop or obtain their own nuclear weapons, lest they be caught short by "enemy powers" in future conflicts. For 44 years Russia, America, and their respective allies fought the Cold War. Aware of the immense power of nuclear arms, and the threat of mutually assured destruction, neither side directly attacked the other, and both were hesitant to deploy nuclear arms again. As time went by the global arsenal of nuclear weapons increased, as did the threat of total nuclear war. The world remembered Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the risk and danger of nuclear arms was clear.

Despite this risk, however, little has been done to prevent or abolish the nuclear arsenal. The UN called for the elimination of atomic weapons in 1946, and many regions around the world have transitioned to nuclear-free zones. Millions of people have marched in protest. The 1968 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons has 190 parties. But despite all of this, 9 of the world's major powers still have more than 14,000 active warheads between them. World War II and the Cold War may officially be over, but the threat of the nuclear bomb remains.

This is where **ICAN** comes in.

The **International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN)** <https://www.icanw.org/> is a global society dedicated to promoting adherence to and implementation of the United Nations' Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Comprised of non-governmental organisations from one hundred countries, they aim to not just stop the proliferation of nuclear weapons, but to prohibit and eliminate them entirely.

Inspired by the success of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, ICAN was launched at the 2007 Vienna meeting of the Treaty of Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, and aims to reshape public discourse about nuclear weapons, to bring to light the humanitarian catastrophes they create. The members of ICAN have seen the horror that nuclear weapons can cause, they've seen the inaction that governments have had, and they want to ensure that Hiroshima and Nagasaki never happen again.

The 2010s were a decade of change for nuclear disarmament. ICAN has been part of many major milestones, including:

- a 2012 global divestment initiative called "Don't Bank on the Bomb", aimed at removing financial support for nuclear weapons,
- acting as a civil society coordinator at three major conferences in 2013 and 2014, all focussing on the humanitarian impacts of nuclear detonations,
- gathering support of 127 nations to create a humanitarian pledge to fill the legal gap for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons,
- in 2016, successfully lobbying the UN General Assembly to adopt a landmark resolution to launch negotiations on a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, an event that marked the end of decades of political paralysis on disarmament efforts, and
- the development of the 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which was adopted by the UN at a vote of 122-1.

Over the years they've garnered support from the Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu, the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, and Pope Francis. They were awarded the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize, in recognition of their work.



After a decade of hard work and progress, ICAN and nuclear disarmament still has a long way to go. Only 37 nations have ratified the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Australia is not one of them. Both the US and Russia have over 6000 warheads each, and neither of them have joined either.

But there is hope for change. Organisations like ICAN have the ability to persuade those in power to make a difference, and we can help. By using the resources ICAN gives us, we can persuade our local politicians and governments to sign the Treaty, and convince them of the need for action. ICAN list many ways for action on their website – www.icanw.org – including ways to approach members of parliament. They also list their partner organisations (including HOPE!) so you can find a local organisation to support as well. I encourage you to visit their website and explore the ways they have helped change the world, and the ways in which you can help.