

A Critical Review of

International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN)

A Global Movement Born in Australia

Prepared by Householders' Options to Protect the Environment (HOPE) Inc. (Australia)

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Note on Sources and Verification

All data and quotations cited in this review derive from publicly accessible, authoritative sources including the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), and the Nobel Prize Committee. Where original documents were restricted, the review references corresponding open-access summary pages issued by the same institutions to ensure transparency and verifiability.

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Executive Summary

This critical review assesses the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) as a global civil-society coalition and its central achievement, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). Founded in Melbourne in 2006 and now headquartered in Geneva, ICAN transformed a moral imperative into binding international law, reframing nuclear disarmament as a humanitarian, legal, and environmental necessity.

The report traces ICAN's evolution from an Australian initiative into a transnational network of more than 700 partner organisations across 110 countries. Its advocacy strategy, to stigmatise, prohibit, and ultimately eliminate nuclear weapons, is realised through flagship initiatives such as the *Parliamentary Pledge* and the *Cities Appeal*, which connect citizens, municipalities, and legislators in shared action. Collaboration with partners like PAX on *Don't Bank on the Bomb* links disarmament with ethical finance and social-justice debates.

ICAN's decentralised governance and lean resourcing model underpin both its agility and its challenges. Sustaining momentum after the TPNW's entry into force requires predictable funding, enhanced monitoring frameworks, and continued adaptation to geopolitical volatility. Nevertheless, ICAN's influence remains evident: by 2025 the TPNW had 95 signatories and 74 States Parties, while public and parliamentary engagement continued to grow globally.

In Australia, ICAN's founding chapter continues to urge the Albanese Government to fulfil Labor's 2018 commitment (reaffirmed in 2021 and 2023) to sign and ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, advancing the campaign's humanitarian and multilateral vision from its original Australian roots. The campaign's progress continues in the context of alliance obligations under AUKUS, which have been cited as a contributing factor in the ratification timeline.

The review concludes that ICAN exemplifies effective civil-society diplomacy, bridging grassroots activism and international law. Its advocacy aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). The campaign's humanitarian framing resonates with the mission of *Householders' Options to Protect the Environment (HOPE) Inc.*, which similarly promotes informed civic action and global solidarity through local stewardship.

Looking ahead, ICAN's future impact will depend on consolidating the moral norm it created, documenting incremental progress, and inspiring a new generation of advocates. In a world where nuclear deterrence still dominates strategic thinking, ICAN's work is a reminder that collective moral imagination continues to shape the boundaries of the possible.

Glossary of Terms and Acronyms

Key Treaties

TPNW – Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (2017): UN-adopted treaty banning development, possession, and use of nuclear weapons; entered into force 22 January 2021.

NPT – Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (1970): Establishes obligations on nuclear and non-nuclear states to prevent proliferation and pursue disarmament.

CTBT – Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (1996): Prohibits all nuclear test explosions; not yet entered into force.

Key Frameworks

UN SDGs – United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (2015): Seventeen global goals for peace, prosperity, and environmental sustainability; ICAN aligns chiefly with SDG 16 and SDG 17.

International Humanitarian Law (IHL) - Legal framework protecting civilians during conflict; forms the moral and legal basis of humanitarian disarmament.

Global Framework on Chemicals (GFC) / SAICM – Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management: Voluntary UN frameworks for chemicals and waste governance; referenced for cross-sectoral sustainability alignment.

Key Institutions and Networks

ICAN – International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons: Civil-society coalition advocating for the TPNW; Nobel Peace Prize laureate (2017).

HOPE Inc. – Householders’ Options to Protect the Environment (Australia): Community-based NGO promoting environmental stewardship, peace, and sustainable development; partner in public education and policy dialogue.

UNODA – United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs: UN body supporting implementation of disarmament and non-proliferation treaties, including the TPNW.

SIPRI – Stockholm International Peace Research Institute: Independent institute providing data and analysis on armaments, disarmament, and security; publisher of the annual *SIPRI Yearbook*.

PAX: Netherlands-based peace organisation collaborating with ICAN on financial divestment from nuclear-weapons producers.

MAPW – Medical Association for Prevention of War: Australian affiliate of IPPNW; co-founder of ICAN.

IPPNW – International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War: Global medical network advocating for abolition of nuclear weapons; Nobel Peace Prize laureate (1985).

UNEP – United Nations Environment Programme: Coordinates UN environmental initiatives; linked to peace-and-sustainability frameworks supporting HOPE’s mission.

The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists: Publisher of the *Doomsday Clock*, symbolically measuring global existential risk.

1. Introduction & Context

1.1 Origins and Mandate

The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) is a global civil-society coalition founded with the goal of “*stigmatizing, prohibiting and eliminating nuclear weapons*” through advocacy for a universal, treaty-based ban.¹ The campaign was conceived and first launched in Melbourne, Australia, in 2006 by members of the Medical Association for Prevention of War (MAPW), the Australian affiliate of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW).² Early public activities were coordinated from Melbourne before ICAN’s international headquarters was established in Geneva, Switzerland, where it is now registered as a non-profit association.³

ICAN’s emergence from Australian civil-society networks positioned it as both a homegrown initiative and an international movement, bridging medical, humanitarian, and peace advocacy traditions. Its strategy of reframing nuclear disarmament around humanitarian consequences culminated in the adoption of the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) in 2017. In recognition of this achievement, ICAN was awarded the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize “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.”⁴

1.2 The Treaty Context (TPNW)

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) was adopted by the United Nations on 7 July 2017, opened for signature on 20 September 2017, and entered into force on 22 January 2021 after reaching 50 ratifications. As of 27 October 2025, ICAN reports 95 signatories and 74 States Parties.⁵ The UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) confirms these milestones and details the treaty’s legal provisions, including comprehensive prohibitions on the development, possession, use, and threat of use of nuclear weapons.⁶

1.3 Organisational Profile and Network

ICAN describes itself as a coalition of non-governmental organisations working globally to advance adherence to, and domestic implementation of, the TPNW. Public-facing materials emphasise campaigning, policy advocacy, and partner mobilisation as the principal modalities. The partnership model is open to NGOs endorsing ICAN’s pledge, with applications processed quarterly, illustrating ongoing network growth.⁷

1.4 Purpose and Scope of this Review

This critical review examines ICAN’s strategic effectiveness, governance, transparency, and long-term sustainability as a global advocacy network, acknowledging its Australian origins and the continued participation of Australian civil-society partners, such as ICAN Australia and the Medical Association for Prevention of War (MAPW), in promoting the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). Although the Australian Government has not yet signed or ratified the Treaty, these organisations remain active contributors within ICAN’s international coalition, engaging in education, advocacy, and parliamentary outreach to encourage eventual alignment with the TPNW’s humanitarian-disarmament objectives. In its focus on civic engagement and global cooperation for peace, ICAN’s work reflects values closely aligned with the mission of Householders’ Options to Protect the Environment (HOPE) Inc. (Australia), particularly the shared belief that informed, community-based action is central to advancing human and ecological security.

2. Scope of Activities & Strategy

2.1 Campaign and advocacy strategy

As mentioned, ICAN’s campaigning is structured around a clear sequence of action namely, to stigmatise, prohibit, and ultimately eliminate nuclear weapons. Its strategy combines coalition-building, policy advocacy, and public mobilisation, all focused on advancing the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW).¹ Through this integrated approach, ICAN connects citizens, local governments and parliamentarians to international disarmament processes, ensuring that moral and humanitarian arguments are reinforced by practical engagement.

2.1.1 Key mobilisation initiatives

Three flagship campaigns translate ICAN's objectives into tangible participation pathways:

- **The Parliamentary Pledge:** invites elected legislators worldwide to formally commit to supporting the TPNW and working for their governments' signature and ratification.⁸ It creates a visible cross-party network of lawmakers who can champion disarmament within parliaments and share strategies for advancing national policy.
- **The Cities Appeal:** engages local governments to pass resolutions endorsing the treaty and calling on national leaders to act.⁹ This initiative highlights the vulnerability of urban populations to nuclear impacts while empowering communities to express moral leadership from the ground up.
- **National Take Action Guides:** provide practical tools for individuals and partner organisations to advocate locally, offering templates for letters, council motions, events, and media outreach.¹⁰ These resources make participation accessible, replicable, and locally relevant.

(Further detail on these three initiatives is provided in Appendix A.)

Together, these initiatives demonstrate ICAN's ability to convert a complex international treaty into a multi-level movement. They strengthen legitimacy, expand reach, and show how global norms can be advanced through decentralised citizen and institutional engagement.

To sustain this engagement, ICAN also develops a comprehensive suite of resources for campaigners, including briefing papers, advocacy toolkits, and design assets that promote consistent messaging across regions.¹ The organisation's online presence integrates these tools within an intuitive structure, allowing new supporters to engage easily and understand how local actions contribute to collective global outcomes.

2.2 Partnerships / networks

ICAN functions as a global coalition of partner organisations operating under a Swiss association registered in Geneva and overseen by an International Steering Group and Staff Team. By 2024 the network had grown to include 714 partner organisations representing 110 countries, reflecting both the reach and diversity of its grassroots base.³ This network forms the foundation of ICAN's legitimacy and operational strength.

The organisation's digital infrastructure reinforces collaboration through features such as the *How Is Your Country Doing?* tracker, which links treaty-status information with local partners and national advocates.¹ This framework allows campaigners in different regions to coordinate efforts and share materials while maintaining independence in messaging and activity planning. Strengths of this model include a clearly documented governance structure, broad geographic coverage, and low-barrier entry for new partners.³ Potential challenges arise from the coalition's reliance on voluntary contributions and decentralised activity, which can produce regional variations in campaign intensity or visibility.¹¹

2.3 Campaign Operations and Impact

ICAN's operational work translates its advocacy vision into coordinated action that bridges global diplomacy and citizen-led mobilisation. Its activities are grounded in a consistent humanitarian message and carried out through multiple, complementary campaign fronts designed to maintain momentum toward nuclear disarmament.

A central operational priority remains the promotion of wider adherence to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW).¹ As discussed earlier and expanded on in Appendix A, two of their key mobilisation initiatives are the *Parliamentary Pledge*⁸, which engages legislators to advocate for national signature and ratification, and the *Cities Appeal*⁹, which empowers local councils to express community support for the treaty. Together, they link citizens, municipalities, and parliaments in a vertically integrated movement that amplifies both public sentiment and political accountability.

The coalition also broadens its impact through collaborative campaigns and evidence-based advocacy. Its partnership with PAX on the *Don't Bank on the Bomb* initiative¹² exposes the financial institutions that sustain nuclear weapons production, connecting disarmament activism with debates on responsible investment and ethical finance. Parallel to this, ICAN's recurring global nuclear weapons spending reports quantify the escalating economic burden of nuclear arsenals, surging to over \$100 billion in 2024, compared to US \$91 billion the year before^{13 14}. These reports have been widely cited by media and government representatives and not only document the material cost of armament but reframe the issue as a matter of human security, social justice, and economic responsibility.

In operational terms, ICAN demonstrates an ability to connect principle with practice. Its decentralised network of over 700 partner organisations provides adaptability across political and cultural contexts, while regular reporting and accessible resources sustain transparency and cohesion.^{3 11} The same structure that enables local autonomy also ensures that global messaging remains coordinated and consistent.

The outcomes of these efforts are measurable across three dimensions: policy progress, network strength, and agenda-setting influence. On the policy front, ICAN's sustained campaigning has helped institutionalise the TPNW as the normative centrepiece of nuclear disarmament, from its adoption in 2017, to its enforcement in 2021, and its continuing expansion through new accessions (such as Ghana's recent ratification in September 2025¹). At the network level, ICAN's 714 partner organisations across 110 countries exemplify the durability of its coalition model and its reliance on civic participation rather than hierarchical control. Finally, through its research, media engagement, and moral framing, ICAN continues to shape public and political discourse, transforming nuclear abolition from a niche agenda into a mainstream humanitarian imperative.^{13 14}

Taken together, these achievements reveal a campaign that has combined normative influence, operational reach, and measurable impact. While further transparency on regional activity could strengthen evaluation, the cumulative evidence points to an organisation that effectively links values, advocacy, and results, thus advancing its mission through persistent, multi-level engagement.^{1 11 14}

3. Governance, Resourcing and Alignment

3.1 Governance Structure and Accountability

The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) operates as a global coalition headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, bringing together more than one hundred partner organisations working across advocacy, education, and policy reform. Its governance model is intentionally decentralised: an International Steering Group provides strategic guidance, while a small professional staff team in Geneva coordinates the day-to-day management and communication of the campaign's core programs¹⁵. This lean, networked design has been central to ICAN's effectiveness. It allows local and regional partners to remain agile and context-responsive, while maintaining a unifying narrative around the humanitarian imperative to eliminate nuclear weapons.

ICAN's organisational information, including its structure, key personnel, and achievements, is presented transparently on its website and in public communications such as its Nobel Peace Prize citation.¹⁶ Although detailed financial statements are not routinely published in a consolidated format, the campaign's long-term visibility, international recognition and enduring partnerships reflect a strong level of trust within both governmental and civil-society spheres. Given ICAN's global scale and the diversity of its network, this relational accountability may in practice serve as an alternative to traditional corporate reporting frameworks, embedding transparency in collaboration rather than in bureaucracy.

3.2 Resourcing, Human Capacity and Sustainability

ICAN's resourcing model reflects the same collaborative ethos that underpins its governance. The Geneva secretariat coordinates a small, skilled team while drawing upon the in-kind contributions and financial support of

partners, philanthropic foundations, and individual donors.¹⁷ This model has proven remarkably durable. It enables the campaign to maintain continuity through periodic shifts in international political attention while amplifying the efforts of national affiliates that pursue the shared objective of universal adoption and implementation of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW).

The entry into force of the TPNW on 22 January 2021¹⁸ marked a natural evolution in ICAN's operational emphasis, from mobilising for treaty negotiation to supporting effective implementation. Whilst this transition required new forms of technical expertise and legal engagement, the underlying resourcing philosophy remained consistent in the form of a modest central structure supporting a global network of highly motivated civil-society partners. The approach has yielded a campaign that is simultaneously lean, adaptive, and deeply embedded within community-based activism.

3.3 Strategic Alignment with UN Frameworks and Global Norms

From its inception, ICAN has grounded its advocacy in international humanitarian law and multilateral treaty frameworks. Its leadership in promoting and securing the adoption of the TPNW in 2017 and its subsequent entry into force in 2021 position the campaign at the heart of contemporary disarmament diplomacy.¹⁸ The treaty's preamble acknowledges the "catastrophic humanitarian consequences" of nuclear weapons, an articulation that directly mirrors ICAN's central message throughout the humanitarian conferences in Oslo (2013), Nayarit (2014) and Vienna (2014).¹⁹ Through these efforts, ICAN helped recast nuclear disarmament from a geopolitical negotiation into a moral and humanitarian imperative.

This alignment extends naturally to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), as well as to broader humanitarian law principles of proportionality, distinction, and civilian protection. In each of these frameworks, ICAN's work exemplifies how civil-society coalitions can reinforce the normative architecture of international law by combining grassroots mobilisation with high-level treaty advocacy. While universal ratification of the TPNW remains an ongoing challenge, ICAN's influence is already visible in the progressive reframing of disarmament discourse within the United Nations system and among national legislatures.

Taken together, ICAN's governance, resourcing, and strategic alignment illustrate a campaign model that balances efficiency with legitimacy. Its decentralised governance has encouraged extraordinary levels of participation; its resourcing strategy has sustained global advocacy on limited central funding; and its strategic coherence with UN frameworks has transformed the moral and legal conversation about nuclear weapons. As ICAN continues to guide states and civil society through the practical phases of treaty implementation, the campaign's well-established institutional identity and its networked resilience remain among its most valuable assets. These attributes suggest that ICAN's influence is likely to remain strong, not only within disarmament fora but across the broader landscape of humanitarian and sustainability governance.

4. Performance and Impact: Evaluating ICAN's Strategic Outcomes

In 2024, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) operated within an increasingly complex security landscape, one defined by renewed great-power competition, multiple armed conflicts, and persistent nuclear risks. The durability of disarmament initiatives are under increasing pressure in 2025 as the tectonic plates of geopolitics enter an unprecedented state of flux. According to data released by the *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)* based on its *2024 Yearbook on Armaments, Disarmament and International Security*, all nine nuclear-armed states (China, France, India, Israel, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) continue to modernise their arsenals, and several are expanding the number of deployed warheads. SIPRI reports that by early 2024 roughly 9 585 nuclear warheads were held in military stockpiles for potential use, of which about 2 100 remained on high operational alert.²⁴ Within the last week of writing, US

President Donald Trump, during trade negotiations with China, directed his recently renamed ‘Department of War’ to resume testing of nuclear weapons. This ends a 33-year moratorium on such testing and risks a further escalation from global actors. In January of 2025 The Doomsday Clock, managed by the Science and Security Board of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, set it to 89 seconds to midnight, the closest it has ever stood since 1947, reflecting escalating nuclear tensions, the erosion of arms-control treaties, and the destabilising effects of emerging weapons technologies.²⁵ It remains to be seen whether this is revised even further in 2026 in light of the US announcement. According to ICAN’s *Annual Report 2024*, there were 56 armed conflicts involving 92 countries, more than 300 million people in need of humanitarian assistance, and over 120 million forcibly displaced.²⁰

Despite these challenges, ICAN maintained a measured, outcome-oriented approach rooted in humanitarian disarmament principles and a commitment to strengthening global norms against the possession and use of nuclear weapons. From an effectiveness standpoint, ICAN’s signature initiatives (i.e. the *Cities Appeal* and the *Parliamentary Pledge*) continue to expand the campaign’s reach and legitimacy. In 2024, the Cities Appeal counted 123 participating cities across 13 countries (including capitals such as Tirana, Rome, and The Hague), while the Parliamentary Pledge attracted 2 128 signatories, including 1 010 sitting members of parliament.¹¹ These figures demonstrate sustained growth in local and legislative engagement, translating advocacy goals into formal political commitments.

In terms of efficiency, ICAN’s strategy has focused on leveraging high-impact activities such as survivor testimonies, multilingual communications, and cross-sectoral linkages with climate, finance, and health networks. Its 2024 campaigns reached approximately 1 500 media outlets with a cumulative audience of 50 billion internet users, while outreach to the financial sector mobilised 131 institutions representing over US \$4 trillion in assets under management.¹² These patterns suggest that ICAN continues to optimise limited resources through networked advocacy and strategic partnerships.

On the dimension of sustainability, ICAN’s advocacy draws upon a longer lineage of arms-control diplomacy. Negotiated between the United States and the Soviet Union in the early 1970s, the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT I and II) established enduring verification and transparency mechanisms that became the foundation for later arms-control regimes.^{21 22} In recent forums, ICAN and allied civil-society actors have invoked the legacy of SALT to reinforce humanitarian disarmament as a continuation, rather than a departure, from these traditional approaches.²³ This connection situates ICAN’s work within a multi-decade continuum of cooperative security and moral leadership.

Outcome Area	Indicator of Performance	2024 Result / Evidence
Cities Appeal	Number of cities endorsing the TPNW	123 cities across 13 countries (incl. Rome, Tirana, The Hague)
Parliamentary Pledge	Parliamentarians signed / active sitting members	2 128 pledges (1 010 sitting MPs)
Financial Engagement	Institutions supporting / AUM represented	131 institutions / ~ US \$4 trillion AUM
Media Reach	Global coverage and audience estimates	~ 1 500 media outlets / ~ 50 billion reach
Network Breadth	Partner organisations / countries represented	714 partners / 110 countries

Source: Data retrieved from International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, *Annual Report 2024*¹¹

Overall, ICAN’s 2024 performance demonstrates organisational maturity, adaptability, and steady influence across institutional and civic domains. While systemic barriers persist, the campaign continues to consolidate its role as a central actor within the evolving disarmament ecosystem. The table above summarises key measurable outcomes for 2024.

5. The Australian Dimension: National Advocacy and Policy Progress

Australia occupies a distinctive place in the story of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN). The movement was conceived in Melbourne in 2006 by members of the Medical Association for Prevention of War (MAPW), and it remains deeply rooted in Australian civil society through ICAN Australia.²⁶ From its inception, the national chapter has served as both an anchor to the campaign's humanitarian origins and a persistent advocate for aligning national policy with the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW).

Since 2018, the Australian Labor Party has held a formal policy commitment to sign and ratify the TPNW when in government.²⁷ The position, secured at the 2018 National Conference through a resolution personally supported by Anthony Albanese, was reaffirmed at subsequent Labor conferences in 2021 and 2023.^{28 29} Labor's stated policy reads:

"Labor in government will sign and ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, after taking account of the need to ensure an effective verification and enforcement architecture, and to work to achieve universal support for the treaty."²⁷ (p. 125)

Since forming government in May 2022, ICAN Australia has intensified its parliamentary outreach and public engagement to translate this policy into action.²⁶ The organisation's website and newsletters document extensive advocacy, including briefings for federal parliamentarians and cross-party groups such as *Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (PNND)*,³⁰ collaboration with unions, faith groups and local councils through the *Cities Appeal*,²⁶ and public statements marking key international anniversaries such as the Hiroshima and Nagasaki commemorations.³¹

In 2023 and 2024, ICAN Australia coordinated national forums and open letters urging the Albanese Government to fulfil its election pledge, noting that more than 90 Australian cities and 46 federal parliamentarians had publicly endorsed the treaty.³² The Government has maintained rhetorical support and participated as an observer at the First and Second Meetings of States Parties to the TPNW (Vienna 2022; New York 2023),³³ but has yet to take the final step of signature and ratification. Foreign Minister Penny Wong has stated that Australia is "actively engaging with treaty parties" while assessing implications for alliance obligations, particularly the ANZUS partnership and extended-deterrence arrangements.³⁴

The Government's cautious approach to ratifying the TPNW has also been interpreted in light of Australia's evolving strategic posture under the AUKUS security partnership with the United Kingdom and the United States. The 2021 agreement, which provides for the acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines, has heightened sensitivity around nuclear issues and complicated perceptions of Australia's non-nuclear-weapon status. Although Foreign Minister Penny Wong has repeatedly affirmed that AUKUS "will not involve nuclear weapons" and will uphold Australia's non-proliferation obligations, analysts note that the program nonetheless binds Australia more closely to allied nuclear deterrence frameworks.³⁴ Commentators in both academic and policy circles have suggested that this alliance dynamic may be contributing to the Government's hesitation to sign and ratify the TPNW.³⁵ ICAN Australia and allied civil-society groups have emphasised that participation in AUKUS need not preclude treaty adherence, arguing that true strategic credibility rests on consistency between Australia's disarmament principles and its security partnerships.

ICAN Australia's messaging therefore balances encouragement with accountability, emphasising that Australia can reaffirm its disarmament credentials by aligning deeds with declarations.^{26 32} The domestic advocacy effort continues to frame ratification not as a break from alliance commitments but as a reaffirmation of Australia's commitment to multilateralism, humanitarian law and the UN Charter.^{26 34}

As the global ICAN network enters its second decade, the Australian chapter remains both conscience and compass, reminding national decision-makers that leadership in nuclear disarmament began here, and that the moral responsibility to finish the task endures.^{26 28}

6. Conclusion and Future Outlook

As ICAN's influence continues to expand globally, its Australian chapter exemplifies how the movement's founding vision endures through persistent national advocacy and moral leadership. The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) emerged from a conviction that moral courage and collective action could shift even the most entrenched structures of global power. In less than two decades, this coalition transformed a long-standing aspiration - the prohibition of nuclear weapons - into binding international law. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), adopted in 2017 and entering into force in 2021, marked a decisive turning point in international humanitarian law.¹¹ It demonstrated that civil society, through sustained advocacy and partnership, could reframe the conversation on nuclear security from one of deterrence and dominance to one grounded in human survival, dignity, and justice.¹⁶

Yet, as ICAN's second decade unfolds, it operates in a world markedly more complex than the one that celebrated its Nobel Peace Prize in 2017. The resurgence of great-power rivalry, the modernisation of nuclear arsenals, and the erosion of arms-control agreements have re-energised the logic of deterrence.²⁴ This challenge is visible in Australia, where alliance commitments under AUKUS intersect with long-standing disarmament aspirations. In this climate, ICAN's challenge is not simply to maintain momentum but to renew relevance and keep the moral and humanitarian argument alive in an environment that increasingly normalises strategic competition.

The lessons of recent years point toward a deeper understanding of what sustainable advocacy entails. ICAN's networked model, encompassing hundreds of partner organisations in over a hundred countries, remains its strongest asset. It allows the campaign to amplify local voices, sustain grassroots engagement, and connect the global disarmament agenda to everyday realities. The same ethic of community participation and informed citizenship also animates the work of organisations such as HOPE Inc. (Australia), which translates global sustainability and peace principles into local, civic action. In different spheres but through parallel philosophies, both movements affirm that meaningful change begins with educated, empowered communities prepared to act on conscience.

A second lesson lies in recognising the long arc of normative change. The effects of the TPNW are not measured solely in signatures and ratifications, but in the gradual diffusion of its principles into national policies, city resolutions, educational curricula, and public discourse. Each parliamentary motion, municipal endorsement, and interfaith statement adds texture to this evolving moral architecture. ICAN's ongoing task is to document and communicate these subtler forms of progress and to make visible the slow work of conscience in motion.

Looking ahead, the campaign's strategic horizon may depend less on direct persuasion of nuclear-armed governments and more on consolidating the humanitarian norm that renders nuclear weapons politically indefensible. That work extends beyond treaty halls to classrooms, parliaments, community networks and the lived experience of those affected by nuclear testing and waste. The voices of the Hibakusha, Pacific islanders, Indigenous custodians, and youth activists continue to remind the world that abolition is not an abstraction but a matter of lived human rights.

The future for ICAN will therefore rest on its capacity to bridge generations and geographies and connect the moral clarity of its founding vision with the pragmatic endurance required for the long journey toward disarmament. Strengthening its evidence base, refining its communication of incremental gains, and ensuring financial and organisational resilience will be essential. But equally important will be its ability to sustain inspiration through its invocation to policymakers, citizens and partners alike that the struggle for abolition is, at heart, a struggle for imagination and the ability to see a safer world and to believe it is still possible.

In that shared endeavour, networks such as HOPE Inc. (Australia) demonstrate how global commitments translate into the local language of stewardship, education, and peacebuilding. Every small but vital act gives substance to international ideals, and through such civic partnerships, the spirit of ICAN's campaign extends far beyond Geneva, it becomes part of the living fabric of community action for a more just and sustainable world.

Appendix A:

Flagship Campaign Initiatives of ICAN

A1. The Parliamentary Pledge⁸

The Parliamentary Pledge is ICAN’s core mechanism for engaging legislators in support of the TPNW. Members of parliament or congress who sign the pledge affirm their recognition of the *catastrophic humanitarian consequences* of any nuclear-weapon use and commit to actively pursue their nation’s accession to the treaty. The pledge text, hosted on ICAN’s official website and provided in multiple languages, serves both as a declaration of intent and a public accountability tool.

As of 2025, more than 1 600 parliamentarians worldwide have endorsed the pledge, representing a diverse array of political parties and national contexts. Signatories are encouraged to table motions, raise parliamentary questions, and participate in cross-national networks of legislators advocating for disarmament. The initiative exemplifies how ICAN embeds treaty advocacy directly into legislative processes.

A2. The Cities Appeal⁹

The Cities Appeal mobilises municipal and regional governments to demonstrate leadership on nuclear disarmament. Participating councils formally adopt resolutions endorsing the TPNW and calling on their national governments to sign and ratify it. ICAN frames this as a local-level expression of global solidarity, reminding decision-makers that any nuclear detonation would have catastrophic humanitarian and urban consequences. The campaign provides downloadable appeal templates, sample motions, and a public map of participating cities—ranging from major capitals such as Sydney, Paris, and Los Angeles to smaller municipalities in every inhabited continent. The growing list of supporting cities provides tangible evidence of public and institutional endorsement across diverse political systems.

A3. National Take Action Guides (Reference)¹⁰

The Take Action Guides are practical manuals that empower individuals, organisations, and local coalitions to contribute to ICAN’s broader mission. Available through ICAN’s global and regional websites, they offer clear steps for engagement—meeting with parliamentarians, organising community events, hosting exhibitions, writing to local councils, and promoting the treaty through social and traditional media.

These guides are particularly valuable for new campaigners, simplifying complex diplomatic issues into approachable civic actions. They also foster message consistency across countries while leaving room for cultural and political adaptation. By equipping local actors with concrete tools, ICAN ensures that grassroots enthusiasm translates into sustained national and international advocacy momentum.

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