

ITUC-AP Statement on the entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)

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A major step towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons

The International Trade Union Confederation – Asia Pacific (ITUC-AP), joins the celebrations for the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) which enters into force today. The Treaty was adopted on 7 July 2017 by the United Nations General Assembly, opened for signature on 20 September 2017, and ratified by Honduras on 24 October 2020. This brought the number of ratifying countries to 50; 90 days later it became legally binding. *Hibakusha* (the victims of the use of nuclear weapons), along with citizens all over the world, have been organised by international civil society organisations to work jointly with willing governments in order to reach this stage. As of today, the Treaty has been signed by 86 states and ratified by 51 states. The ITUC-AP hopes that today's entry into force will further promote the Treaty to other states and be a major step towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons.

The TPNW and the NPT working in union

We are concerned that the United States, Russia and the other original nuclear powers, as well as those under a nuclear umbrella (including Japan, the only country exposed to nuclear weapons), have turned their backs on the Treaty. There is criticism among these countries that the TPNW is dangerous to the 50-year-old Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). They believe the TPNW to be divisive in the international community, risking further entrenching division in the existing non-proliferation and disarmament fora that offer the only realistic prospect for consequence-based progress. While the NPT allows the original nuclear powers to possess nuclear weapons, it requires their effort for nuclear disarmament. It is the attitude of these powers, neglecting the requirement with nuclear possession as their privilege, that has led to the division from non-owning countries. The international community needs to strengthen its disarmament efforts with the TPNW and the NPT working in unison.

“Any use of nuclear weapons would also be abhorrent to the principles of humanity”

The TPNW requires all ratifying countries to undertake the following: “never under any circumstances to develop, test, produce, manufacture, otherwise acquire, possess or stockpile nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices”. It also bans any transfer, or use, or threat to use such weapons. All ratifying countries are bound by these requirements. Of course, the legally

binding force does not reach non-ratifying countries. The idea of deterrence is understandable, but it is doubtful whether it will always work or will last forever. As the world is still at risk of an accidental nuclear disaster, the Treaty, “reaffirming that any use of nuclear weapons would also be abhorrent to the principles of humanity and the dictates of public conscience”, will act as a deterrent to nuclear weapons even if the states actually try to use them.

Reduce military expenditure to revitalise public services, public investment and decent jobs

It is of great concern that Asia and the Pacific is the only region in which annual growth of military expenditure has been continuous since 1989, and the growth of 51 per cent over the decade 2010-19 is by far the largest of any region. The current COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the imbalanced structure of public spending. Years of ill-guided austerity measures and cuts in public spending on healthcare, coupled with privatization of public services, have undermined the capacity to adequately tackle the crisis. If each of the countries had allocated part of their military expenditure to a policy to secure universal access to social protection and adequate living wages, the lives of more people could have been saved. The ITUC-AP calls for reductions in military spending as well as the conversion of military industries into civil and sustainable industries to revitalise public services and public investment, and create decent jobs.