

Factsheet

What is a treaty?

The way countries co operate with each other is by means of treaties. There are treaties on trade, mobile phone use, health care, animal welfare, pets, drugs, food standards, vehicle standards, educational standards and many other issues.

TPNW – The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

Why it came about

The new Treaty, the TPNW, emerged because previous nuclear weapons treaties such as the 1968 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), had very limited success in restricting the number of nuclear weapons.

UN treaties are often drawn up by diplomats. The preparation of the TPNW also involved non-governmental organisations, like ICAN and Scottish CND who have a focus on nuclear disarmament.

These non-governmental organisations, often referred to as civil society, asked questions like:

- what if there was a nuclear accident?
- is it right that 9 countries have nuclear weapons but the risks of having and using them affects every country and everyone? Is that global security?

This led to an international UN conference where the TPNW was written and signed by 122 countries. By October 2020, 50 countries had ratified the Treaty.

The Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons became law on 22nd January 2021 making the weapons illegal in the countries which have ratified it.

Why is Britain opposed to the Treaty?

Although the British Government claims it would like to cooperate to reduce the number of nuclear weapons it is not prepared to sign this treaty.

The British Government does not want to sign this treaty as it would make nuclear weapons illegal in Britain.

Britain is part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Of the 30 NATO member states, 3, USA, France and Britain have nuclear weapons. Britain's nuclear weapons system is a fleet of 4 Trident Submarines.

However, the TPNW has been deliberately worded to allow nuclear armed states to join the Treaty provided they develop a road map to dispose of their nuclear weapons.

Support or Oppose

Proposition - "Britain should ratify the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons"

Here are some sources that support or oppose the proposition that Britain should ratify the TPNW

Source 1

Statements from the International Red Cross and Red Crescent
<https://www.icrc.org/en>

"Whether the explosion is a result of a missile strike during an armed conflict, an act of terrorism or an accidental detonation, it will have a major impact on the health of those directly affected and on the capacity to provide assistance to survivors in the immediate aftermath"

"The most terrifying weapon ever invented"

Nuclear weapons are the most terrifying weapon ever invented:
no weapon is more destructive;
no weapon causes such unspeakable human suffering;
and there is no way to control how far the radioactive fallout will spread
or how long the effects will last.

A nuclear bomb detonated in a city would immediately kill tens of thousands of people, and tens of thousands more would suffer horrific injuries and later die from radiation exposure.

In addition to the immense short-term loss of life, a nuclear war could cause long-term damage to our planet. It could severely disrupt the earth's ecosystem and reduce global temperatures, resulting in food shortages around the world."

Source 2

Statement from NATO's nuclear deterrence policy and forces
https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_50068.htm

"The role of NATO's nuclear forces

The fundamental purpose of NATO's nuclear forces is for deterrence. Nuclear weapons are unique and the circumstances under which NATO might have to use nuclear weapons is extremely remote. Furthermore, any employment of nuclear weapons against NATO would fundamentally alter the nature of a conflict. However, should the fundamental security of any NATO Ally be threatened, NATO has the

capabilities – both nuclear and conventional – and the resolve to impose costs on the adversary that would be unacceptable and far outweigh the benefits that any adversary could hope to achieve.”

source 3

Nicola Sturgeon First Minister of Scotland

Her statement when the TPNW came into force in January 2021:

“...they are morally, strategically and economically wrong. They are indiscriminate and devastating in their impacts; their use would bring unspeakable humanitarian suffering and widespread environmental damage. The Scottish Government is firmly opposed to the possession, threat and use of nuclear weapons and we are committed to pursuing the safe and the complete withdrawal of all nuclear weapons from Scotland.”

Source 4

Statement from the Ministry of Defence

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-nuclear-deterrence-factsheet/uk-nuclear-deterrence-what-you-need-to-know>

“Threat

- it is a key responsibility of the government to be sure that the UK is properly protected should the future turn out to be less secure than we hope
- in spite of the successes of arms control activities in slowing the proliferation of nuclear weapons, the number of states with nuclear capabilities has continued to grow
- there are risks that, over the next 20 to 50 years, a major direct nuclear threat to the UK or our NATO allies might re-emerge; a state’s intent in relation to the use or threat of use of existing capabilities could change relatively quickly: for example, there was little prior warning of the collapse of the Soviet Union”