

**Canadian Senate briefing on the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons
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19 January 2021

Thank you, Senator McPhedran, for organising this important event and everyone for attending. Thank you also to all of the Senators and parliamentarians who have signed onto the [ICAN Parliamentary Pledge](#) endorsing the TPNW.

As the other speakers today have noted, the TPNW is an important legal tool to help achieve the elimination of nuclear weapons, and it's vital that Canada sign and ratify it. Part of the reason the government has opposed the TPNW is because of its membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation—and in particular, because of the pressure of the United States, United Kingdom, and France on NATO allies to reject this treaty.

NATO was not always a nuclear alliance. An excellent [article](#) by Norwegian scholar Kjølvi Egeland lays out the history of NATO's discourse and policy on nuclear weapons, showing how over time the United States in particular compelled NATO to include nuclear weapons in its security doctrine, to introduce the concept of nuclear sharing, and to entrench the idea that NATO is—and always will—be a “nuclear alliance”. They did this because they need to share the moral burden of nuclear weapons—by nuclearising NATO, it was easier for the United States, UK, and France to resist pressure and face critique about their possession and deployment of nuclear weapons. By integrating “deterrence” within NATO policy, it provided the three nuclear-armed members of NATO to normalize this concept, a concept that at its core is about threatening to destroy cities and commit genocide as a tenant of “security”.

In the past, Canada has resisted NATO becoming nuclearised, along with other members such as Denmark, Norway, Iceland, and Spain. But past Canadian governments were bullied into accepting US nuclear weapons on our soil, and into permitting NATO doctrine to incorporate nuclear weapons. This wasn't something Canada supported, it was something Canada *went along with after objecting very clearly to it*. We did send back the US nuclear weapons later on, but nuclear sharing has persisted in five European states. When Germany suggested in 2009 it wanted to have a conversation about denuclearising, the US accused it of being selfish and that is when the language around NATO being a nuclear alliance solidified.

This is important to keep in mind. NATO is and should be beholden to all of its members, not just the nuclear-armed ones. But it is the nuclear-armed members of NATO that have dictated the alliance's policy on this issue.

In December, NATO put out a statement about the TPNW that was filled with factual inaccuracies. It says the TPNW is incompatible with the NPT, but as others today have explained, this is false. The TPNW is an effort to fulfill the mandate of the NPT, which is to end the nuclear arms race, prevent proliferation, and achieve nuclear disarmament. The TPNW serves all three of these through its prohibitions on nuclear weapon activities and through its provisions for the elimination of nuclear weapon programmes.

Right now, it is not the TPNW but the governments of the nuclear-armed states themselves that are undermining the non-proliferation and disarmament architecture: by refusing to comply with their legal obligations, by withdrawing from multilateral and bilateral agreements, and by investing in the modernization and expansion of their nuclear arsenals. The NATO statement says the TPNW will not lead to nuclear disarmament, but the mere existence of the TPNW may help facilitate nuclear disarmament through other instruments and agreements, regardless of whether or not nuclear-armed states ever join it. If we think about the larger architecture of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, we can see the ways in which the instruments agreed upon so far are iterative, building off of each other to create a whole under which the necessity of nuclear disarmament becomes inevitable.

There are many more incorrect and misleading assertions made by the NATO statements; I have prepared a [document](#) outlining all of these in greater detail.

Overall, the core problem with NATO's position on the TPNW is that it rejects the only treaty categorically outlawing the most destructive weapon on the planet, which positions NATO as a supporter of nuclear weapon possession and possible use, not of nuclear disarmament.

This is at odds with Canada's stated pursuit of peace, equality, and human security. In the Canadian government's stated intentions and understandings, international relations should be based on diplomacy, cooperation, and coordination, not on threats of mass destruction and zero-sum game theory.

Rejecting the TPNW is at odds with Canada's pursuit of a feminist foreign policy. The TPNW is the first feminist international law on nuclear weapons. Not only does it promote gender equality in disarmament and recognise gendered and racialised impacts of nuclear weapons, but it was also democratically negotiated. Unlike many processes, where the most heavily militarised countries have the loudest say—including within NATO policy making settings!—the negotiations of the TPNW created space for all countries to participate on an equal footing. This is why the TPNW is so strong, and it's why the nuclear-armed states are so afraid of it. If they truly felt this treaty would not have an impact, they would not spend so much time trying to undermine it or threatening other countries not to join it.

Indeed, the normative impact of the treaty is already being felt, before it enters into force. Financial institutions are divesting money from nuclear weapon producers. Cities and towns are calling on their federal government to join the treaty—including in Canada, where Toronto, Vancouver, Victoria, Halifax, and many others have endorsed the ICAN Cities Appeal. Public opinion across NATO states overwhelmingly supports the TPNW.

Canada has a chance to be on the right side of history, but this requires it to take bold steps within NATO to do so. Feminism, however, is about courage. Signing and ratifying the TPNW is an opportunity for Canada to show that it truly does embrace a feminist foreign policy, which requires it to stand up to bullies, to patriarchal traditions that accord might the power over right.

Canada needs to renounce nuclear deterrence, end its role in the NATO nuclear war planning group, refuse to accept nuclear weapons in its security doctrines, and work to change NATO's position on nuclear weapons—or leave NATO. Other NATO states are interested in changing nuclear policy. There is an appetite for change, but we need bold, courageous, moral leadership to make it happen. Canada has been that voice in other situations—banning landmines, working globally for gender equality. We need to be that voice on nuclear weapons. It's an opportunity for historic change in a new era that relies not on *violence* for peace but on *community and justice* for peace.