

ICAN Statement to the 2022 NPT Review Conference

5 August 2022

I am Liza, I am 18 years old and I'm speaking on behalf of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons. I am also speaking as a representative of Ukrainian youth. Russia's war against Ukraine and the realities of nuclear threats bring me to New York. How do I feel about being here now? I feel grateful for the opportunity to be heard, to be a voice of youth. At the same time, I feel pain. I am Liza, I am 18 years old, I am a voice of Ukrainian youth.

Most Ukrainians like me did not believe that this war was possible. We never imagined that we will be suffering from a brutal aggression reminiscent of the colonial era, coupled with inhumane crimes and torture that break every law of war, all made possible by the terrorizing threats to use nuclear weapons.

But here we are. Do Ukrainians now believe that the Russian government's nuclear threats are real? Unfortunately, we do. Through the five months of this cruel war we realize that there is no limit to how far towards the unimaginable they can go. An NPT nuclear-weapon state threatens to use its nuclear arsenal not only against a sovereign NPT non-nuclear-weapon state, but against anyone who dares to intervene in the conflict to help protect innocent lives. Nuclear weapons are killing people in Ukraine even when they are not used because Russia is utilizing nuclear deterrence as a shield to protect its atrocities.

This is unacceptable. As parties to the NPT, it is your job to condemn this and all nuclear threats, and to make sure it never happens again. Otherwise, what is the point of this conference?

Fifty-two years since the Treaty's entry into force we see that the international security system has failed to do what it is supposed to do, totally paralyzed by a nuclear-armed veto-holder. Nuclear-weapon states have failed to fulfil their disarmament obligations, yet nuclear deterrence has worked – to deter the enforcement of human rights, to deter justice, to deter help, to deter the hope my generation should feel.

I feel that the nuclear-weapon states have turned their back on the NPT, not living up to their commitments. China and Russia are increasing their arsenals, and the United Kingdom has raised the cap on the maximum number of warheads by 40%. All the nuclear-armed countries are fueling a new nuclear arms race by spending \$82 billion on nuclear weapons in 2021 alone, including building new and more dangerous weapons.

But it is not just the nuclear-weapon states. None of the non-nuclear-weapon states that rely on extended nuclear deterrence (the “nuclear umbrella”) have taken any steps towards reducing their reliance on nuclear weapons. Instead, more states come under the “umbrella,” moving in the opposite direction. Moreover, Belarus is offering to host nuclear weapons on its territory.

What signal does this send to the world? That these countries think security is impossible without nuclear weapons? Is it not why we hear the DPRK declare its readiness to use its nuclear potential? Must we actually see nuclear weapons used again before we finally make real efforts to end this nuclear tyranny? We cannot risk it: the next time could be the last time, ending the whole world too.

Believing that a nuclear exchange can be limited is a dangerous thought, there are too many risks that it will not be. And even if it will, how can we let so many people endure so much pain for generations? Radiation knows no borders, and our globalized world knows no isolation from the socioeconomic catastrophe of even a limited nuclear conflict. We know the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons too well: nuclear use brought tremendous suffering in Hiroshima and Nagasaki; the consequences of nuclear testing still haunt the people of Kazakhstan, the Marshall Islands, and elsewhere.

I feel that people have forgotten the horrors that the use of nuclear weapons brings. Think about it: the world has erased the collective memories of 1938 and appeased the aggressor in 2014 again. Humanity did not learn from the past and let a big war happen in Europe in 2022. Do we really want to repeat the use of nuclear weapons as well, this time risking to be wiped out from our planet? We must stop this, and for the sake of future generations, we cannot afford to wait.

It can be done. It is not some dream. The NPT review conference was postponed due to the global pandemic and 2022, by an unlucky coincidence, highlighted that nuclear threats can be confronted, must be condemned, and must be stopped. There is a unique opportunity for brave decisions: many countries here have already shown the way, by creating the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Now nuclear weapons, like chemical and biological weapons, are comprehensively prohibited by international law. I want to thank the 66 TPNW member states that confronted and unequivocally condemned nuclear threats by adopting the Vienna Declaration and that made a plan for disarmament by adopting the 50 point Vienna Action Plan. They are making the NPT stronger, they are advancing the disarmament obligations in the treaty. I urge all NPT members to strengthen this synergy by signing and ratifying the TPNW.

Why am I here? I am Liza, I am 18 years old, I am Ukrainian, and I do hope for the safe future of my country and the world. The future with less fear. The future with no nuclear war. The future with no nuclear weapons.