

# Second Meeting of States Parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

Distr.: General  
14 November 2023

English only

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New York, 27 November–1 December 2023

## The Role of Peace and Disarmament Education in Advancing the Vienna Action Plan

Working paper submitted by Soka Gakkai International

### I. Introduction

1. The importance of peace and disarmament education is highlighted in a preambular paragraph of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), which states: “Recognizing also the importance of peace and disarmament education in all its aspects and of raising awareness of the risks and consequences of nuclear weapons for current and future generations, and committed to the dissemination of the principles and norms of this Treaty...”

2. The Vienna Action Plan was adopted in June 2022 “to facilitate effective and timely implementation of the Treaty and its objectives and goals following the first Meeting of States Parties.” While it does not dedicate a specific section or action(s) on “education” per se, it is inherent to a number of actions promote awareness-raising, learning, information sharing and other activities that include educational components. Furthermore, as our previous working paper “Including peace and disarmament education in implementing universalization obligations under article 12” submitted to the first Meeting of the States Parties (MSP) to the TPNW notes:

“Peace and disarmament education is essential to the achievement of the objectives of the TPNW, as awareness-raising for the public will help underpin and maintain the principles and norms of this Treaty globally. Peace and disarmament can only be achieved through an informed and continued demand by people, understanding each person’s common responsibility for achieving this goal and strengthening the norm that disarmament—including the prohibition of nuclear weapons—is a critical step for international peace and security.”<sup>1</sup>

3. The Vienna Action Plan recognizes that “The situations and positions of States currently outside the Treaty differ widely” and that such differences need to be taken into account in implementing the universalization obligations of the Treaty. Such

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<sup>1</sup> TPNW/MSP/2022/NGO/32, para. 5, available at: [https://documents.unoda.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/TPNW.MSP\\_2022.NGO\\_32.pdf](https://documents.unoda.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/TPNW.MSP_2022.NGO_32.pdf).

differences necessitate that relevant information and rationale for the signing and ratification of the TPNW specific to each State's situation be presented in manners most appropriate for each context. Such activities can involve not only the States Parties of the TPNW, but also the UN agencies, international organizations, civil society, as well as countries not yet parties to the Treaty. Therefore, peace and disarmament education is an undertaking any stakeholders can engage in, in order to advance the implementation of the Vienna Action Plan and, by extension, the TPNW.

4. Furthermore, the public awareness about the ongoing relevance of nuclear threats has been reignited in recent years, at least in some parts of the world, due to multiple factors such as the ongoing conflict in Ukraine and the release of the film "Oppenheimer." Studies such as one published in 2023 in the U.S. indicate the public interest in learning more about nuclear policy<sup>2</sup>, while some public opinion polls already indicate strong support for the TPNW in many countries, including nuclear-weapon and nuclear-dependent States.<sup>3</sup> The Soka Gakkai Student Division in Japan has conducted awareness surveys of university students on matters related to nuclear weapons and peace since 1994. The results from the recent years show that a majority of students think about nuclear weapons on a daily basis, yet the percentage of youth who have heard testimonies of a-bomb survivors has declined.<sup>4</sup> In other words, there are opportunities for further education and awareness raising to strengthen the global norms against nuclear weapons.

5. Against this backdrop, this paper builds upon the previous working paper.<sup>5</sup> Specifically, it considers two themes that would be relevant to the discussions at the second MSP: (1) how peace and disarmament education could contribute to the implementation of the Vienna Action Plan, adopted at the first MSP; and (2) what kind of education would help achieve the first point.

## **II. Raising Awareness of the Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons**

6. The Vienna Action Plan points to the importance of highlighting the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons. For instance, Action 1, noting that universalization efforts must be a priority of States Parties, states: "These efforts should focus on increasing the number of signatures and ratifications, as well as actively engaging in promoting the norms, values and underlying arguments of the Treaty, such as concern about the inherent risks and catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons..." This point is stressed again in Action 10: "To highlight the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons, the risks associated with these weapons and the legal and ethical questions regarding the use and the threat of use of nuclear weapons and the practice of nuclear deterrence."

7. The Action Plan further suggests that highlighting the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons should be part of the approach in engaging with those States that are currently committed to nuclear deterrence. This is expressed in Action 12: "To engage with those States that for the moment remain committed to nuclear weapons and nuclear deterrence, inter alia, by providing opportunities for dialogue, highlighting the underlying rationale of the Treaty and the humanitarian

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<sup>2</sup> See: <https://globalaffairs.org/research/public-opinion-survey/majority-us-want-learn-more-about-nuclear-policy>.

<sup>3</sup> For example, see: [https://www.icanw.org/nato\\_poll\\_2021](https://www.icanw.org/nato_poll_2021).

<sup>4</sup> The survey results in Japanese (up to year 2022) is available at: <https://www.sokagakkai.jp/in-society/hiroshima/peace-awareness-survey.html>.

<sup>5</sup> TPNW/MSP/2022/NGO/32.

consequences of nuclear weapons and their inherent risks, and pursuing a fact-based approach in engaging with concerns or criticisms about the Treaty.”

8. This is in alignment with the humanitarian initiative that led to the eventual negotiation and adoption of the TPNW. International conferences on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons that took place in 2013 and 2014, for instance, were vital occasions for learning about the catastrophic impacts that would result from any use of nuclear weapons and for dissemination of the facts of these realities to a broad international audience. In other words, the TPNW was negotiated and adopted in response to the deep concerns for the catastrophic humanitarian and environmental consequences of nuclear weapons, as well as the strong wishes of hibakusha and affected communities for nuclear abolition; therefore, highlighting such concerns remains the central part of the universalization and implementation of the Treaty.

9. Learning about the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons helps us understand that this is not an abstract issue about political tools far removed from our daily lives. Therefore, any education about nuclear weapons must include, and ideally start with, raising awareness about the devastating humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons.

### **III. Education to Implement Articles 6 and 7**

10. As mentioned earlier, grave concerns for the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons have been central to the TPNW. This is particularly evident in the Treaty’s positive obligations, i.e., Articles 6 and 7 addressing victim assistance, environmental remediation and international cooperation and assistance.

11. For the States Parties of the TPNW, it is important that they be informed of the needs of the affected communities, in order to begin addressing the harms caused by nuclear weapons. To this end, as Action 19 notes, it is critical to “engage with relevant stakeholders, including international organizations, civil society, affected communities, indigenous peoples, and youth, and work cooperatively to advance the effective and sustainable implementation of articles 6 and 7,” and to “closely consult with, actively involve, and disseminate information to, affected communities at all stages of the victim assistance and environmental remediation process.”

12. The Vienna Action Plan also acknowledges the importance of information exchange with States not party to the Treaty that have used or tested nuclear weapons, or any other nuclear explosive devices (Action 20), as well as among States Parties for the implementation of articles 6 and 7 through voluntary reporting on national measures related to victim assistance, environmental remediation and international cooperation and assistance (Action 27).

13. Expertise and experiences of affected communities must be centered in such efforts for implementing Articles 6 and 7, just as their contributions were central to the development of the TPNW. As such, States Parties should continue supporting any efforts to amplify the voices of affected communities and provide opportunities for all stakeholders and the members of the public to learn from their lived experiences.

### **IV. Education about the Treaty Itself**

14. The TPNW is a young treaty, and thus there is a need to continue increasing the public’s awareness of the Treaty and its significance. Action 1 therefore stresses the need for States Parties to actively engage in activities to promote “the Treaty’s effective contribution towards disarmament and international peace and security.” Likewise, Action 7 states: “To raise awareness of the Treaty at international

conferences and regional workshops and seminars, as well as through the commissioning of studies and publications to promote the case for the Treaty.”

15. In this context, as the Vienna Action Plan notes, it is valuable to highlight and underscore the complementarities between the TPNW and other international legal instruments within the disarmament and non-proliferation architecture. For instance, Action 38 urges States Parties of the TPNW to “continue to work together on outreach projects in order to raise awareness, not only among Governments, but also with civil society, academia, parliamentarians and the general public, including youth organizations, so as to highlight the complementarity between the Treaty and the existing disarmament and non-proliferation regime, including nuclear-weapon-free zone treaties.” Similarly, Action 45 states: “To enhance and make use of synergies between the Treaty and other relevant instruments of disarmament and of international humanitarian and human rights law to which States parties to the Treaty are party.”

16. Furthermore, as part of its commitment to universalizing the Treaty, Action 5 of the Vienna Action Plan states: “To share best practices and provide technical support for the ratification process, for example through capacity-building activities, such as workshops and seminars, to explain the provisions of the Treaty in detail and help to clarify the steps that a prospective State party would have to undertake to implement the Treaty. To that end, parties will endeavour to utilize existing regional and multilateral frameworks, as feasible.”

## V. Recommendations

17. Based on the shared recognition that the horrors of nuclear weapons must never be visited upon any country, or any persons, we recommend that the States Parties of the TPNW consider the following at the Second Meeting of the States Parties and beyond:

(a) Articulate in statements and any outcome documents of TPNW Meetings of States Parties that peace and disarmament education is a key element of fulfilling obligations under the TPNW;

(b) Report on risk education programs, as recommended in the Report of the Co-Chairs of the informal working group on victim assistance, environmental remediation, international cooperation and assistance (Kazakhstan and Kiribati)<sup>6</sup>;

(c) Endeavor to integrate information on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons in educational curriculums where possible;

(d) Develop educational programs about the global hibakusha, in addition to education about the history and experience of Hiroshima and Nagasaki;

(e) Engage in educational activities in accordance with the Vienna Action Plan’s commitment to inclusivity and particularly its sensitivity to gender perspectives (e.g., Actions 25, 39, 47), especially respecting and highlighting the voices of affected communities and survivors.

(f) Convene regional workshops and seminars where feasible to promote awareness of the TPNW and provide practical information to prospective States Parties.

(g) Provide funding and institutional support to international organizations, associations of survivors and affected communities, civil society, and educational

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<sup>6</sup> TPNW/MSP/2023/3, para. 24 and Form B.

institutions promoting peace and disarmament education, particularly regarding the TPNW and the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons;

(h) Support research on the humanitarian and environmental consequences of nuclear weapons;

(i) Support research addressing the role that colonialism, racism, patriarchy and other structures of oppression have played and continue to play in the development, deployment, testing and use of nuclear weapons;

(j) Declassify documents and release information related to nuclear weapons activities, such as surveys of radiological conditions of test sites; fallout monitoring data; records of incidents, accidents and/or close calls;

(k) Support inclusion of youth in delegations and policy conversations regarding nuclear disarmament, including TPNW Meetings of States Parties and Intersessional meetings;

(l) Contribute to the Secretary-General's report on Disarmament and Non-proliferation Education;

(m) Utilize international days such as International Day for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Awareness (5 March), International Day against Nuclear Tests (29 August), and International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons (26 September) to highlight humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons and promote awareness of the TPNW.

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