

**NUCLEAR  
JUSTICE:**

**A GLOBAL  
PERSPECTIVE  
ON THE IMPACT  
OF NUCLEAR  
WEAPONS**

International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons | Germany



**ICAN**  
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# ABOUT ICAN

ICAN Germany is based in Berlin and is a member of the global ICAN alliance of over 600 organizations in over 100 countries. Since its foundation in 2014, ICAN Germany has been supporting the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which was adopted at the United Nations in New York in 2017 and came into force in 2021. ICAN was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2017 for its commitment to this process. ICAN Germany is independent and has no party political affiliations. The work of the association is largely supported by the commitment of volunteers and the support of donors and sustaining members.



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# INTRODUCTION

The discussion surrounding nuclear weapons and their effects often revolves solely around the context of deterrence at the state level, thereby overlooking those directly impacted. This is where the concept of nuclear justice comes into play, aiming to amplify marginalized perspectives. The concept emerged from the activist movements of communities affected by nuclear weapons and emphasizes their lived experiences and expertise.

Threats to livelihoods and health posed by nuclear weapons are primarily the responsibility of states in the Global North. The real effects disproportionately affect communities and states of the Global South. These (nuclear) injustices and (neo-colonial) power structures are already being discussed in relation to individual policy areas. However, less attention is paid to the intersectional impact of the consequences of multiple, simultaneous political crises on the same communities. For instance, the inhabitants of the Marshall Islands are simultaneously struggling with the intergenerational health consequences and environmental destruction caused by US nuclear weapons tests as well as the consequences of climate change. Research also reveals the gender and body-specific facets of nuclear injustice: Women\* bear a disproportionate burden, experiencing heightened risks like an increased likelihood of cancer. Additionally, the unequal distribution of caregiving responsibilities within families and societies exacerbates these effects.

The United Nations Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), adopted in 2017, recognizes for the first time the gender-specific impacts of nuclear weapons testing and use, as well as their disproportionate impact on indigenous peoples. Articles 6 and 7 of the TPNW, in particular, provide a framework under international law for environmental remediation and victim assistance for damage caused by nuclear weapons.

Whether through the production, testing or use of nuclear weapons, the living situation of those affected by these weapons shows how the political crises caused by the Global North endanger the livelihoods and human security of structurally marginalized groups. These lived realities are still discussed far too little. In pursuing a fair and just resolution to nuclear issues, it is imperative to prioritize and heed the voices of those directly affected. In our commitment to fostering nuclear justice, we recognize that the lived experiences, expertise/knowledge and perspectives of individuals impacted by nuclear weapons are invaluable. This brochure serves as a platform to elevate these voices, placing them at the forefront of our collective efforts. By actively listening to and understanding the concerns, aspirations, and challenges faced by affected communities, we believe it is possible to navigate a path toward equitable solutions.

Nuclear Justice is accordingly the goal to reach. It encapsulates the ethical and moral principles necessary to address the complex challenges associated with nuclear activities. It signifies a commitment to rectify historical injustices, ensure transparency, and empower affected communities. At its core, nuclear justice demands a balanced and inclusive approach that acknowledges the rights and concerns of all stakeholders. By striving for nuclear justice, we envision a future where the benefits and burdens of nuclear endeavors are equitably distributed, fostering a global landscape that upholds the values of integrity, equity, and human dignity.

Nuclear Justice is also at the core of ICAN Germany's campaign "Nuclear Survivors – Together for Nuclear Justice". Its goals are

**1. strengthening the perception of the public and political decision-makers in Germany about the perspective of those affected by nuclear weapons (production and use – the atomic bombings on Nagasaki/Hiroshima and tests);**

**2. creating space for people from affected countries in German and multilateral forums so that they can contribute their perspectives and expertise to the political discourse and help shape it;**

**3. developing policy recommendations for political decision-makers together with those affected in order to promote concrete projects for environmental remediation and victim assistance.**

This publication aims to offer a comprehensive exploration of diverse topics concerning nuclear weapons and their effects, with a particular emphasis on the concept of nuclear justice. Starting with an introduction to the subject, delving into minority rights and presenting a Global South perspective on nuclear justice. The authors then shift their focus to humanitarian consequences, incorporating case studies from Algeria, the Marshall Islands and the Ore Mountains. Finally, the publication concludes by shedding light on the exclusivity of the nuclear discourse and the challenges faced by individuals from marginalised groups in participating in multilateral fora.





# Pursuing Nuclear Justice: Confronting Unequal Impacts on Minorities

## Denisa Muhameti

Since the first nuclear test explosion in 1945, the pursuit of nuclear arms has come at a devastating cost to minority groups worldwide. Indigenous communities, racial minorities, and vulnerable, disadvantaged, and marginalized ethnic populations have disproportionately borne the toxic burdens of nuclear weapons advancement in the name of national security. Across the nuclear age, these vulnerable peoples have faced greater exposure to radiation, contamination of lands, and dismissive technocratic policies that sacrifice minority welfare. At the time, their voices and objections went unheeded by governments and scientists racing for supremacy. Unfortunately, this painful history remains inadequately confronted even today. Achieving true nuclear justice requires addressing this entrenched imbalance of risks and burdens imposed on minorities. Dominant ethnic groups and economic elites often controlled nuclear deci-

sion-making, testing locations, and uranium mining. Locations in remote areas near indigenous communities were chosen without consent, reflecting their political exclusion.


When nuclear disasters occurred, whether tests went awry or accidents like Three Mile Island, marginalized minorities living nearby bore the health costs too. Yet their grievances were suppressed and warnings ignored. Racist notions of acceptable harm, that these other peoples were expendable, enabled recklessness.

Indigenous peoples and minority groups have faced extensive displacement and radiation exposure from nuclear testing programs. Native American lands in Nevada were seized and bombed over 900 times for US weapons testing, leaving a legacy of cancer in Western Shoshone communities. Aboriginal Australi-



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**ALL BEINGS,  
INCLUDING  
THOSE  
NOT YET BORN,  
DESERVE A  
FAIR CHANCE  
AT LIFE.**

ans suffered the loss of traditional homelands from British testing in the Outback during the 1950s and 1960s. Over 450 nuclear tests were conducted in the Semipalatinsk Test Site, Kazakhstan, by the Soviet Union from 1949-1989. More than 40 atmospheric, underwater, and underground nuclear tests were carried out in Lop Nur, Xinjiang, by China between 1964 and 1996. Across the Pacific, island populations endured relocation and contamination from extensive US and French testing through the late 1990s.

Decolonizing the future of nuclear technology means valuing all human life potentially impacted equally. Policies must incorporate minority experiences and voices, respect indigenous connections to irradiated lands, and standards of environmental justice shall demand comprehensive remediation where past activities caused damage.

Steps toward this goal include investing to restore contaminated native lands and waters poisoned by decades of uranium mining and nuclear testing, so earnest recovery of communities can begin. Integrating indigenous worldviews on intergenerational reciprocity and responsible stewardship into nuclear governance, breaking from the siloed technocracy dominating state programs, is also imperative. It is vital that we integrate indi-

genous perspectives on reciprocity between generations and responsible environmental stewardship into the governance of nuclear technology. We must break away from the technocratic silos that currently dominate state nuclear programs. Integrating indigenous worldviews that value intergenerational justice would preclude poisoning the lives of future peoples and nature for the sake of short-term gains that only benefit us now. All beings, including those not yet born, deserve a fair chance at life.

Expanding access, opportunities, and influence for minorities in nuclear-related fields, from physicists to regulators, brings urgent voices to the table. Formally acknowledging historical wrongs and harms imposed on marginalized peoples through reckless testing and uranium extraction allows for reconciliation. Simply committing nations to disarmament and non-proliferation treaties is not enough - we must demand tangible action and accountability. Nations must actively and transparently reduce stockpiles, dismantle weapons, and open facilities to rigorous verification. By taking concrete steps to eliminate nuclear arms today, we can substantially reduce future generations' exposure to these immoral and inhumane weapons. Disarmament treaties without implementation allow states to stall and obfuscate while endangering humanity's future. We cannot be passive - we must urgently and vocally compel nations to verifiably disarm.

Through sustained public education, inclusion of impacted minority advocates, and policies founded on ethics of environmental justice, the world can gradually chart a more just nuclear-free future. But this requires rejecting the entrenched power imbalances and indifference to human inequality that previously marked the atomic age's birth. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) presents an opportunity to break from the dangerous nuclear policies and practices of the past. By joining the TPNW, nations can choose a nuclear-free future over continued reliance on these immoral weapons that put humanity at catastrophic risk.

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# Towards Nuclear Justice: A Global South Perspective

Leila  
Hennaoui

The conventional discourse on nuclear issues has primarily revolved around rules and standards shaped by global superpowers to advance their interests. However, as the world aspires to evolve towards establishing a more equitable global order, the discourse's focus started shifting towards nuclear justice. Within this context, two distinct approaches can be observed. The first approach identifies injustices within the existing nonproliferation regime's norms and institutions. While the second addresses historical injustices and consequences of nuclear actions, irrespective of their alignment with the regime's norms. In this complex realm of nuclear justice, it is imperative to give prominence to the perspective of the Global South, acknowledging both their deep-rooted grievances and their development concerns.

At the origin of the Global South's stance on nuclear justice is their experienced nuclear injustices deeply rooted in colonial and imperial practices in the superpowers' nuclear


activities. Global South countries were often used as nuclear testing grounds for colonial powers, as most nuclear weapon states conducted their initial nuclear testing programs within colonized territories. These tests resulted in the destruction of human, animal, and vegetal life and the contamination of lands. Furthermore, these tests were characterized by the use of discursive colonial strategies that involved dishonesty, misinformation, and secrecy to downplay the contamination risks. The consequences of these tests persist to this day, with former colonial powers often withholding relevant crucial information, thus exacerbating ongoing concerns regarding their humanitarian and environmental impacts. This colonial historical legacy profoundly influences the Global South's approach to nuclear justice, focusing it on the underscoring deep-rooted apprehensions about the test's lingering effects, leading these countries to advocate for accountability for nuclear weapons testing and overall nuclear disarmament and justice.



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An aerial photograph of a desert landscape, likely in the southwestern United States, showing a small, dark blue lake in the center surrounded by arid, brownish terrain with some sparse green vegetation. The text is overlaid on this image.

**IN CONCLUSION, IT IS EVIDENT  
THAT THE GLOBAL SOUTH'S  
PERSPECTIVE ON NUCLEAR  
JUSTICE UNDERSCORES THE  
IMPORTANCE OF ADDRESSING  
HISTORICAL GRIEVANCES,  
PURSUING INCLUSIVITY, AND  
ADVOCATING FOR A BALANCED  
NUCLEAR DIPLOMACY AGENDA.**



Moreover, the broader international nuclear landscape recently is witnessing a growing dissatisfaction with the existing nuclear non-proliferation regime owing to institutionalized inequalities inherent in its cornerstone, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The NPT legally distinguishes between two categories: nuclear-weapon states (NWSs) and non-nuclear-weapon states (NNWSs), assigning different rights and duties and perpetuating inequalities within its framework. This discontent is particularly expressed by the Global South countries as they contest the unequal distribution of rights and privileges and the seemingly uneven implementation of international norms and most importantly the restricted access to nuclear technology. For these developing countries, nuclear energy is seen as a “green,” “clean,” and “sustainable” energy source and is sought as a potential avenue to realize their development aspirations. However, the regime’s norms and practices, which have been stringent and further tightened over time, are viewed as unjust, as they hinder the realization of these aspirations. Furthermore, the lasting memory of colonial deprivation continues to cast a shadow over the developing countries’ perception of the regime. Consequently, they are not prepared to accept unequal intrusion into their sovereignty, particularly when it is initiated by the same powers that once subjected them to harsh colonial rule. A pertinent example of this intrusiveness is the discriminatory application of export controls on nuclear technology, which hinders developing countries’ access to peaceful nuclear energy for their development.

It is interesting to note that the Global South, despite facing significant challenges, has played an active and influential role in global nuclear affairs, exerting its influence on negotiations and shaping policies to address inherent disparities in the global nuclear landscape. Their engagement took diverse forms, with regional initiatives like the establishment of nuclear weapon-free zones and transnational efforts within the Non-Aligned Movement demonstrated by the significant contribution to the negotiation of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. The Global South’s involvement has left particularly a lasting impact on the disarmament agenda, with their influence evident in resolutions passed by the General Assembly and Security Council. Nevertheless, in recent times, their participation in multilateral forums has been marked by growing frustration and a quest for greater inclusivity, prompted by the perceived limitations on peaceful nuclear energy use and imbalances between non-proliferation and disarmament efforts. This discontent is exemplified by their large endorsement of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which primarily focuses on nuclear weapons but also recognizes the importance of peaceful uses of nuclear technology. The recognition of peaceful uses was crucial for gaining the support of a majority of states, especially developing ones, as it ensures their inalienable right to develop

nuclear energy for peaceful purposes without discrimination. This can be considered as a shift that underscores the need for a more inclusive approach to nuclear issues and emphasizes the broader theme of global nuclear diplomacy dynamics. Nonetheless, The Global South’s advocacy for a balanced and inclusive nuclear agenda is challenged by complex global dynamics, as exemplified by the cautious stance of the Vienna Declaration.

In conclusion, it is evident that the Global South’s perspective on nuclear justice underscores the importance of addressing historical grievances, pursuing inclusivity, and advocating for a balanced nuclear diplomacy agenda. This perspective offers a pathway towards a more just and equitable global nuclear order, driven by the experiences and aspirations of those who have historically endured nuclear injustices, as well as the developmental interests of nations seeking a role in shaping a more peaceful and equitable world.

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# The Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons: A Testament to Their Inherent Injustice

## Carlos Umaña

Nuclear weapons are an acute manifestation of power imbalance, profound inequality, and stark injustice. They reflect and contribute to a world ruled by violence, by the rule of might, and are rooted in xenophobia and colonialism.

The knowledge about the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons also stems from this inequality, for it is the powerless who have suffered their effects.

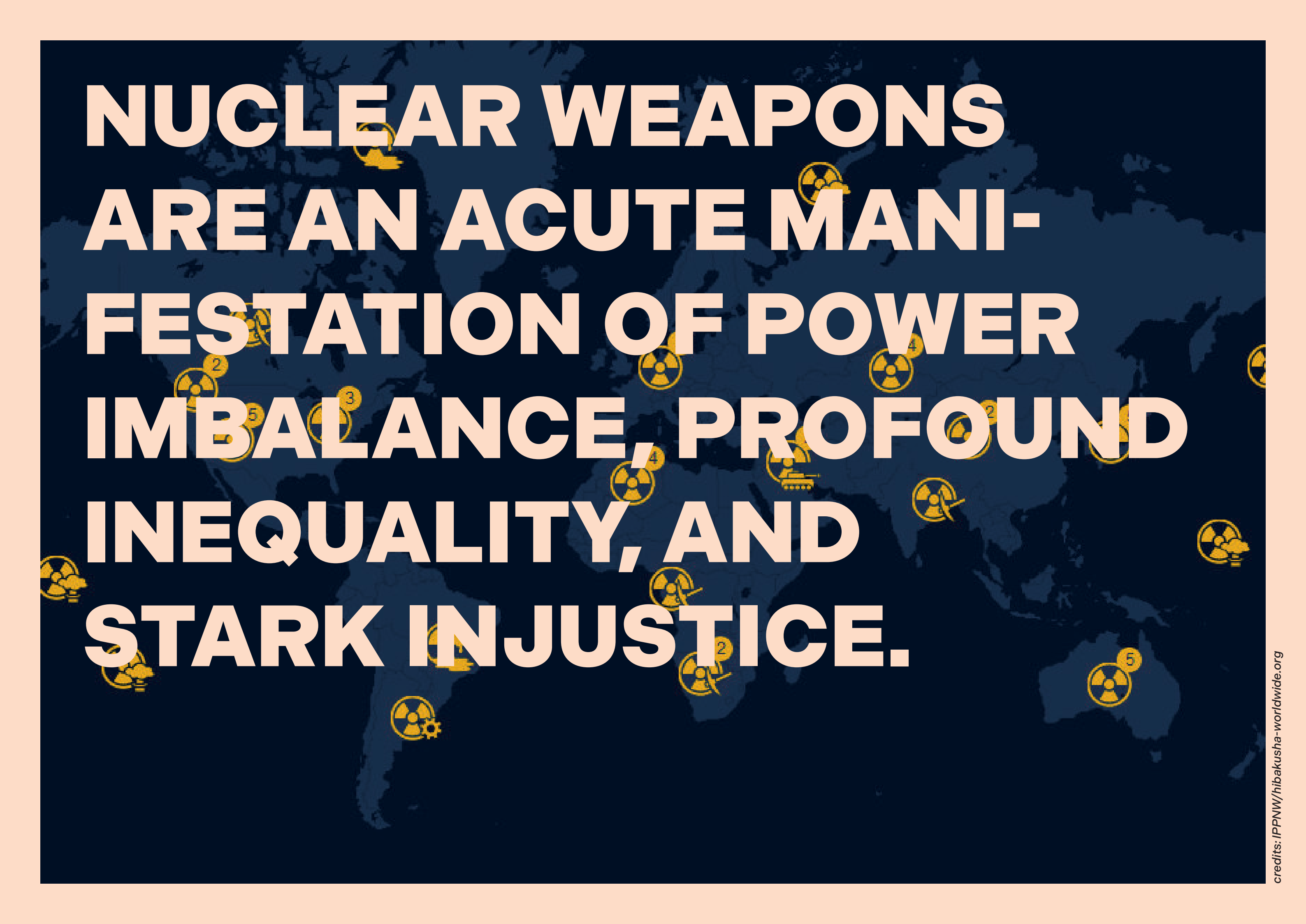
Today, if a single tactical nuclear weapon were to be detonated over a large city, with a destructive yield of about 100 kilotons -roughly 6 times that of the one detonated over Hiroshima-, the consequences would be dire. The blast, the heat and the radiation would instantly kill hundreds of thousands of civilians, and many more would be injured. These people would not only suffer from the usual

trauma and burn wounds from explosive weapons, but they would also suffer acute and chronic radiation poisoning. Acute radiation syndrome, one of the most painful conditions anyone can endure, would cause a breakdown of vital organs and tissues. This means, as we saw in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, that their eyes would fall out, their faces would melt, their abdomens would explode. Their wounds would not heal, and they would bleed to death. The victims of this horrible disease, the non-combatant women, elderly and children, would suffer their agony alone as the radiation, coupled with the destruction of communication and health infrastructures, would prevent them from receiving medical attention or first-response aid.



Carlos Umaña

is Co-President of IPPNW (1985 Nobel Peace Prize) and part of ICAN's International Steering Group, as well as a general practitioner with a background in clinical research, epidemiology, gynecology, obstetrics, nutrition, and fine arts. Former Health Department Director at the Costa Rican Ministry of Health, he currently presides IPPNW Costa Rica, founded „Artists for Peace“ (2014), co-founded „Peace and Diversity“ (2018), and the Alliance for Nuclear Disarmament in Spain. He received the „Alan Turing“ Award for LGBTIQ Visibility in 2018. Since 2013, he has focused on raising awareness about the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons and supporting the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) through conferences, round tables, and activism.

A dark blue world map serves as the background. Scattered across the map are several yellow icons: the international symbol for nuclear radiation (a circle with three blades) and small yellow circles containing numbers (1, 2, 3, 4, 5). These icons are placed over various continents, including North America, Europe, Africa, and Australia. The text is overlaid on the map in a large, bold, white sans-serif font.

**NUCLEAR WEAPONS  
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Those who survive this would have a higher incidence of cancers and other chronic diseases and would have a high probability of miscarriages and bearing jellyfish and deformed babies, as well as serious mental health issues such as PTSD, anxiety, depression and suicide. The survivors of this attack will further suffer stigmatization: in Japan, the survivors, known as the Hibakusha had trouble finding work, because of their perceived propensity for illness, and finding a partner, because of the possibility of fathering or bearing deformed children.

These effects are not a thing of the past. Nuclear weapon states have carried out 2056 tests on the lands, water and bodies of indigenous peoples who, to this day, continue to suffer biological and social effects, as well as displacement from contaminated lands. Uranium is being mined on indigenous lands and the facilities for the development of nuclear weapons, and the radioactive waste, is located largely near poor communities. The common denominator behind these victims: they are neither rich nor white. Moreover, women and girls are biologically more susceptible to developing solid cancers from ionizing radiation, they give birth to babies with serious deformities and, aside from being the caretakers of those handicapped either by injury or malformation, suffer the social stigma of being “unmarriageable”.

If a full-scale nuclear war breaks out, it will imply many detonations over many cities. This would cause tens of millions of deaths, hundreds of millions of injured people, and great environmental devastation caused not only by the destruction of the bombs and by the radiation that would spread globally, but also by the soot and debris that would rise to

the atmosphere and block the sunlight, drastically lowering the world’s temperature by an average of 25 degrees Celsius for several years, in what is known as a nuclear winter. Given that few food chains would be able to withstand the prolonged lack of sunlight and such a drastic cooling, this would mean the demise of many of the Earth’s ecosystems. A large-scale nuclear war could thus not only end civilization as we know it but also our species, along with many others.

The risk of this is greater than ever. In 2023, the Doomsday Clock marks 90 seconds to midnight, the highest risk in history. This is partly due to the risk of accidents or miscalculations. Of the current arsenal of roughly 12,500 warheads, around 2000 warheads are on a state of high alert. In turn, the systems detecting incoming nuclear attacks are increasingly reliant on automated systems, and thus, increasingly vulnerable to cyberattacks and technical and human error. Many accidents have been documented with nuclear arsenals and, on six occasions - that we know of - the world has been on the brink of nuclear war by accident. The famous words of Robert McNamara, Secretary of State in the United States during the Cuban missile crisis stand out: “It was luck that prevented nuclear war”.

This risk is, of course, increased by the two ongoing armed conflicts involving nuclear weapon states, in which outright violations of international law and human rights are being committed and are causing tremendous suffering to innocent civilians.

Now, nuclear weapons are not about security, but about projecting power, and that power projection has produced many victims over the years, not the least of which is informa-

tion. Making nuclear weapons the currency of power has implied shaping public opinion and promoting the virtues of the atomic era. To this end, their humanitarian impact has been actively and deliberately hidden from the world. Strict censorship was applied in Japan, where medical records, photographs, personal letters, even paintings and poems were confiscated and censored to keep the world from knowing about radiation poisoning.

The vast resources currently invested in nuclear weapons, nearly 83 billion dollars per year, not only finance their modernization and development but also think tanks and the promotion of the mainstream narrative.

The holders of nuclear weapons are aware that they cannot be used: their effects cannot be controlled, they do not respect borders, they are not made to destroy military targets but to cause massive and indiscriminate destruction and death to many civilians and the environment, and using them would be suicidal and would lead to a devastation of global proportions. Their value lies in the threat they represent, but also in the status that they bestow. It is an absurdity that does not withstand the test of logic or evidence, but that most people rarely question, thanks to decades of effective propaganda.

In sharp contrast to this disinformation is humanitarian disarmament, a process that purports to stigmatize nuclear weapons by focusing on their consequences to humanity, placing people at the center of discussions, and rejecting the notion that nuclear weapons are assets for security and stability.

Spinning the wheels of science and democracy has resulted in the absolute condemnation of nuclear weapons and the negotiation of the landmark Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons which promotes multilateralism and evidence-based policymaking, essential ingredients for nuclear disarmament, true security and peace.

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# The French Nuclear Testing in the Sahara and its Radioactive Legacies

**Aayushi Sharma**

The international community reached a major breakthrough with the coming into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), the first international instrument to take into account the humanitarian and environmental consequences of the use and testing of nuclear weapons. This obligation imposed on the state parties allows for the much-needed recognition of the irreversible damage caused as a consequence of nuclear weapons testing. Ever since the culmination of the nuclear age, nuclear weapons testing has exposed communities living in the vicinity of test sites to grapple with the radioactive legacies of the testing events. Although the work towards legal recognition of the impact of nuclear weapons testing and tangible action towards victims' assistance as well as environmental remediation has culminated, there is still a long road ahead.

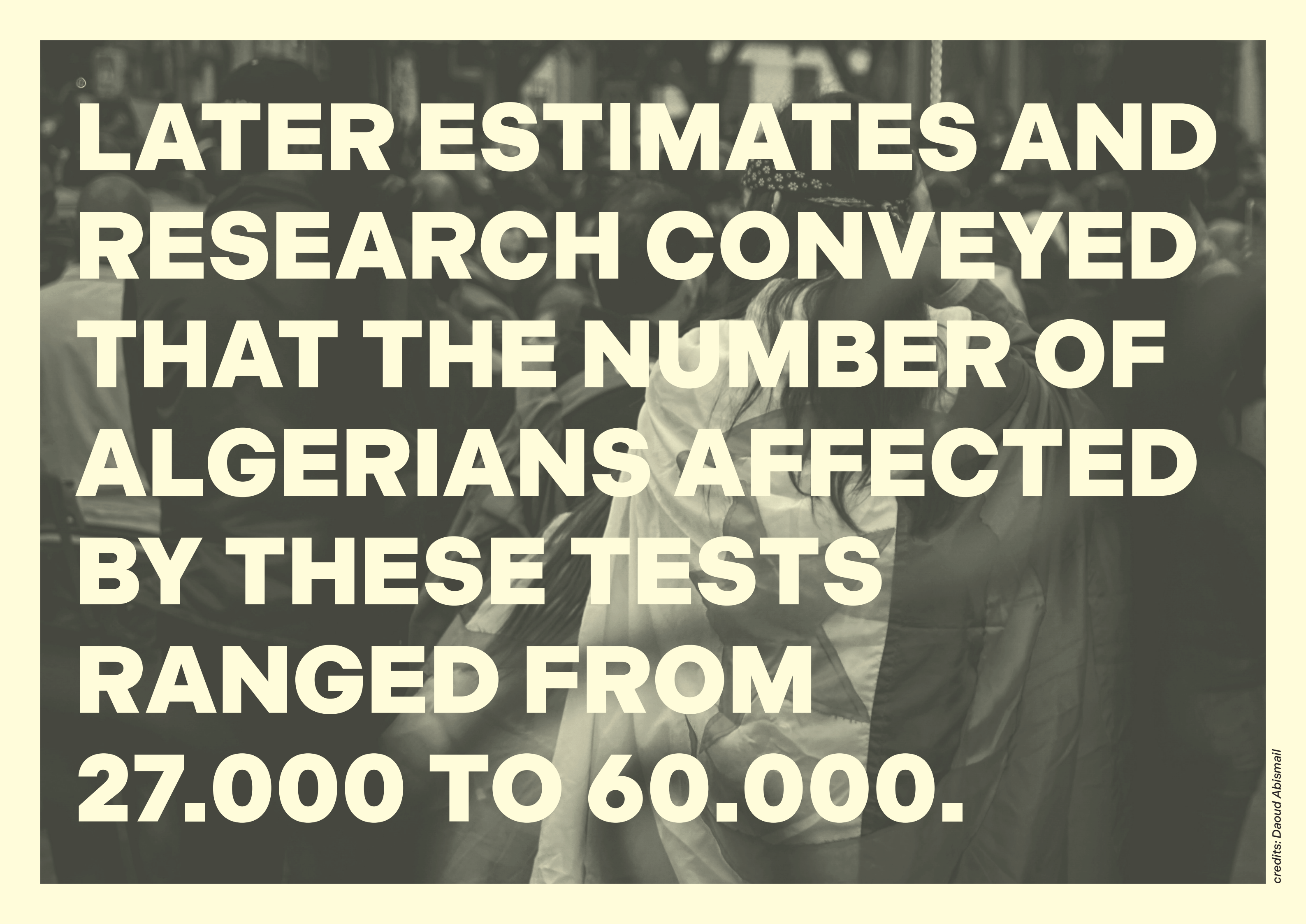
Just like other regions in the Global South, one region still struggling with the hazardous legacies of nuclear testing coupled with its colonial past, is the Algerian Sahara. In just a matter of six years, between 1960 and 1966, France conducted a total of 17 nuclear tests in the Sahara, thereby contaminating the region for decades to come. Out of these 17, four tests were atmospheric while the rest remained underground. The four atmospheric tests, namely Gerboise Bleue, Gerboise Blanche, Gerboise Rouge and Gerboise Verte, had an estimated explosive power of about 73 kilotons. The first test, Gerboise Bleue, itself had an explosive capacity of more than 60 kilotons. To put this in context, it was four times the capacity of Little Boy - the atomic bomb detonated over Hiroshima by the United States in 1945.

Aayushi Sharma

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**LATER ESTIMATES AND  
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The Commissariat à l'Énergie Atomique, the French Atomic Energy Commission tasked with the objective of carrying out the nuclear tests, chose the site of Hammoudia, 70 km to the southwest of Reggane. It is important here to note that Reggane Ville, an inhabited establishment situated near the Reggane oasis, has a population of about 20,000 people. Hammoudia is also about 700 km south of Bechar, a city with a population of almost 165,000. Taking a survey of the surrounding regions and inhabited areas provides a perspective into the number of people at risk of contamination caused by the radioactive fallout from these tests. More so, the effects of exposure to radiation are very much intergenerational, leading to subsequent generations also bearing the brunt of the hazardous activities. According to the testimonies of the veterans working on these tests, there was a radioactive fallout as a result of the atmospheric tests which had profound impacts on the communities, the natural resources and the vegetation of the Sahara. Research conducted by the International Atomic Energy Agency in the Sahara revealed the presence of areas contaminated with cesium-137, strontium-90 and plutonium-239 in the regions surrounding the test site. These high-level nuclear wastes are extremely hazardous as they lead to the production of fatal radiation doses. Not to mention that much of the radioactive waste

from those tests was buried under the sand of the desert, thus posing detrimental damage to the underground resources.

Apart from the four atmospheric tests, the remaining tests were conducted underground – the testing site was moved from Reggane to 600 km South-East of Reggane, to In Ekker. Four of these tests also became the cause of perhaps the worst radiation exposure in the record of French nuclear tests in the Algerian Sahara. One of the worst cases of exposure occurred at the accident of the venting of the 'Beryl' test in 1962. The failure to contain the venting resulted in the exposure and the explosive power of the test was estimated to be between 10 to 30 kilotons. The fallout of the test exposed many people to higher levels of radiation, some even receiving up to 200 to 600 mSv, which was the highest recorded count at the time. The atmospheric and underground tests combined were also aimed at testing the reaction of various entities upon exposure to radiation. Live animals were deliberately exposed to radiation through the third test and during the fourth atmospheric test, around 195 men were purposefully exposed to the radiation near ground zero to record their reaction to the exposure, as per the reports.

Decades later, the communities of the Algerian Sahara still suffer from the consequences of

these tests. The hazardous legacies of the tests continue to manifest themselves in terms of long-term diseases and other intergenerational health issues. Later estimates and research conveyed that the number of Algerians affected by these tests ranged from 27.000 to 60.000. It is also important to note here that not just the people within the Saharan communities but also the French military veterans and civil personnel working on these projects have been deliberately exposed to lethal amounts of radiation, leading to long-term consequences. At present, there is a dire need to call for affirmative action to deal with the radioactive waste buried underground as a result of the underground nuclear tests, as per the obligations of Articles 6 and 7 of the TPNW.

Lymphoma, birth defects, physical deformities, and different types of cancers are just a few of the long-term consequences of exposure to radioactivity. There is also the reality of the people living in the Algerian Sahara even after decades of nuclear testing events. To address the true horrors imposed by nuclear weapons testing, it is important to give unwavering attention to providing tangible assistance to these communities.

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# Nuclear-affected Communities

## Benetick Kabua Maddison

When the general public turns its attention to nuclear weapons, it is usually due to fear of their use during international conflicts and times of war. Nuclear-affected communities have a much different perspective, however. The development, production, testing, and use of nuclear weapons, as well as the clean-up of accidental spills, testing sites, and leaking storage sites, have had a devastating and lasting impact on communities around the world. Not surprisingly, those who have been most affected are often marginalized, indigenous, or people of color. The humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons on these communities, which are forced to endure the ongoing biological, ecological, and cultural consequences of the actions of nuclear weapons states, calls for their total elimination.

The Manhattan Project, a secret U.S. program to develop the atomic bomb during World War II, directly impacted numerous Native communities near the Hanford plutonium site in Washington State, including the Nez Perce, Umatilla, Wanapum, and Yakama tribal nations. In the Southwest, the Navajo, Shoshone, Ute, Pueblo, and other nations were directly affected by uranium mining and activities at the Los Alamos National Laboratory. Nuclear weapons development and production poisoned their lands and livestock and evicted communities from their sacred lands. The destruction and contamination of the environment continue to impact the health of Native communities and their lands. Similar stories are found among other individuals and communities in the United States, Japan, Australia, the Pacific Islands, Algeria, Kazakhstan, and other communities worldwide, all of whom



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**EVERY NUCLEAR-AFFECTED  
COMMUNITY SUFFERS FROM  
HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL  
ISSUES.**



will grapple with these nuclear consequences for many generations to come. It is important to acknowledge that imperialism, colonialism, racism, and white supremacy are the root causes of nuclear weapons, and the weapons were created for one purpose only: to destroy anyone and anything in their path.

The toxic legacy of American nuclear weapons testing on the Marshall Islands is one of numerous examples of the impacts of these catastrophic devices on unsuspecting populations. The United States conducted 67 nuclear tests on Marshallese ancestral lands and their pristine waters between 1946 and 1958 with the support of the United Nations.

Most of these were detonated after Marshallese leaders petitioned the UN in 1954 and 1956 to halt U.S. nuclear testing in the Marshall Islands due to radiation exposure and the removal of peoples from their ancestral lands.

The Marshallese people, foreign fishermen, workers from other Pacific nations, and U.S. soldiers were all exposed to harmful radiation during testing and cleanup efforts. Despite declassified documents released under the Clinton administration in the 1990s, the United States continue to maintain that only four specific atoll populations in the Marshall Islands are nuclear affected, despite what their own documents show. Limiting the true impact and scope of the testing allows the

government to deny responsibility for the consequences. Not surprisingly, this scenario of withholding information and denying culpability is a common theme of nuclear-armed states. Another example is in Mā'ohi Nui (French Polynesia), where the French government has covered up the extent of nuclear damage that has directly harmed the people's health and their environment.

As is the case in the Marshall Islands and French Polynesia, all nuclear-affected communities suffer from cancers and other nuclear-related illnesses, such as diabetes, due to the contamination and displacement from lands that communities can no longer rely on for a healthy diet. Nuclear weapons also contribute to birth defects and other genetic issues. For the lands used for testing or storage, the destruction and contamination left behind are irreversible, and it will take tens of thousands of years for the environment to heal. To make matters worse, for many communities, the climate crisis will exacerbate nuclear-induced health and environmental issues, as is the case in the Marshall Islands and Kiribati, both of which are nuclear-affected states on the frontline of climate change and are at risk of becoming uninhabitable due to sea level rise within our lifetime.

Every nuclear-affected community suffers from health and environmental issues. Similarly, the nuclear weapons states that

destroyed and contaminated their lands and bodies have the same toxic traits. Above all, none of the affected communities have yet to achieve nuclear and environmental justice; some even say that no amount of reparations, clean up, or recognition would be just. Nuclear-affected communities do not want other communities to suffer the same health, environmental, and cultural consequences. They also want their stories to be told and their voices to be heard so that the world truly understands the consequences of what it means to be a nuclear-armed state. It is only then that citizens will push their governments to eliminate nuclear weapons. Until then, those who know firsthand the devastating impact of nuclear weapons and activities will continue to demand justice and fight for a world without nuclear weapons.

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Elisabeth  
Saar

In the nuclear discourse, deterrence predominantly unfolds through the lens of aggressors. The state perspective is at the centre of possible deterrence scenarios and their effects. Those affected by the production of nuclear weapons, locally and beyond the state level, seem invisible in the big abstract game of nuclear deterrence. So where does the uranium for these weapons actually come from, and where and by whom is it mined?

ore under asymmetrical power structures and perilous working conditions, for example in Arlit, Niger, or Rössing, Namibia. This not only bears economic implications but, above all, culminates in lasting environmental degradation, demanding prolonged remediation efforts at contaminated sites. It poses a threat to already scarce water resources and imposes substantial health risks upon miners and local residents. Although Kazakhstan, Canada, and Australia are the largest uranium producers, ahead of Niger and Namibia, the import-export balance (including uranium demand for civilian use) reveals continuing (neo)colonial structures, with countries of the Global South mining uranium ore in surplus and bearing

NUCLEAR JUSTICE

Invisible Voices of Uranium  
Mining in the Big Abstract  
Game of Nuclear Deterrence

Uranium is extracted disproportionally in areas formerly occupied or colonised, or on lands belonging to Indigenous peoples. The oppression of nuclear weapons extends beyond their use or the looming threat; they resonate in the very process of their production, commencing with the extraction of uranium ore. The mining of uranium is determined by the entrenched patriarchal, racist, and capitalist structures that form the bedrock of the nuclear order. In former colonial territories, notably on the African continent, people are still being exploited for the extraction of uranium

the humanitarian consequences while the Global North consumes.

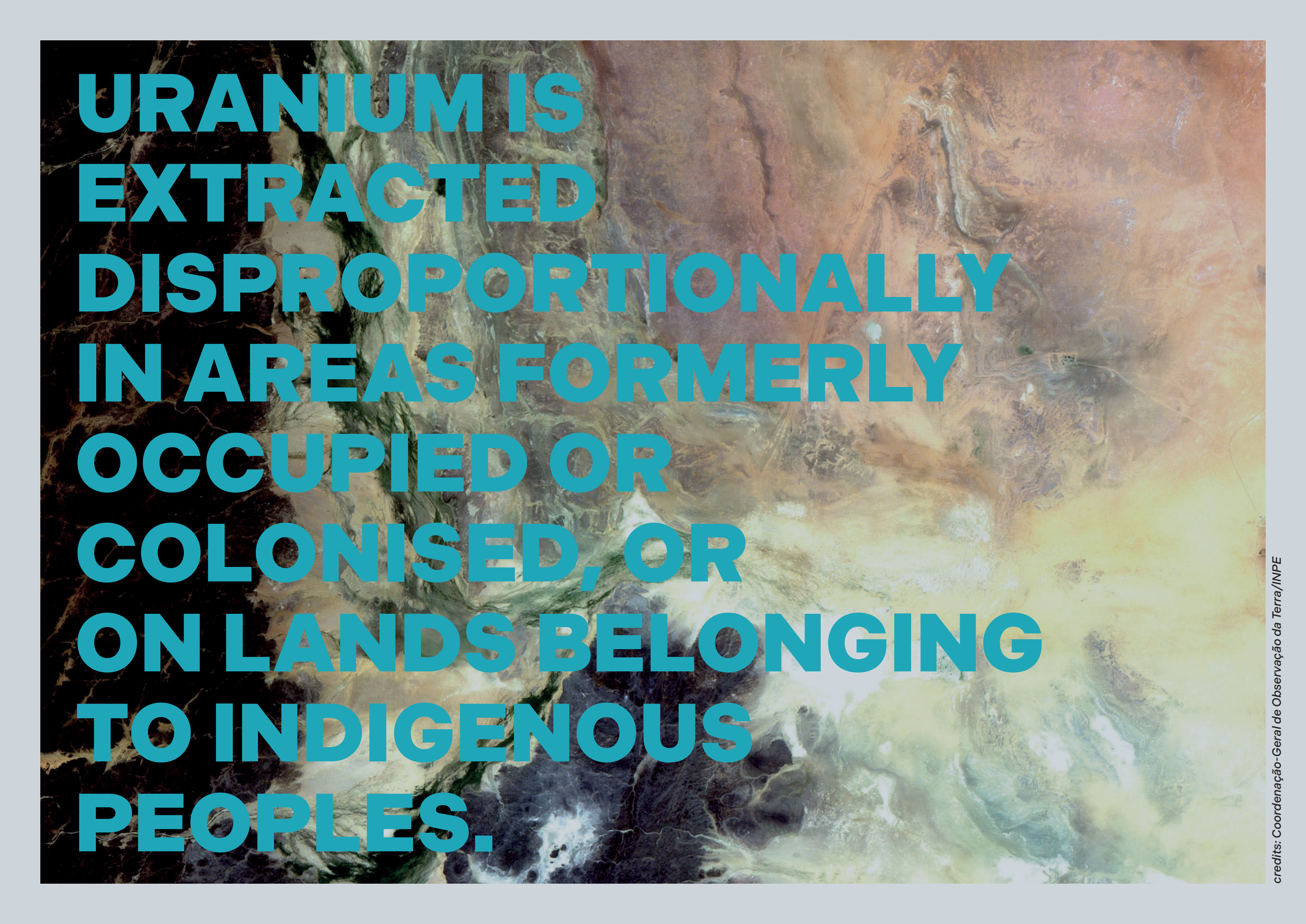
Uranium mining for civilian use is controversially discussed in the context of justice issues: On the one hand, non-nuclear weapon states address their frustration with the nuclear order and the demand for distributive justice in the accessibility of nuclear technology, which is currently very significant for the establishment and functionality of the disarmament and non-proliferation regime. On the other hand, these efforts take place within



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the framework of the existing nuclear order, which not only poses the potential risk of the establishment of a nuclear arsenal but also legitimises and reproduces the status quo. With regard to the concept of nuclear justice, uranium mining for military use is considered in a focussed manner, as this can be embedded in a military strategy, a political logic – in the security narrative of the logic of deterrence. Uranium mining for civilian use should not be disregarded, as it is intricately linked to imperial dependency structures and humanitarian consequences, but the genuinely political character of uranium mining for the production of nuclear weapons is emphasised here as part of the overarching nuclear deterrence.

African states in particular played a central role in the nuclear arms race before and during the Cold War. The uranium mining and exploration in Africa began in the early 1940s in colonised Congo and South Africa, triggered by the need to secure sufficient uranium for the US Manhattan Project. Especially the Shinkolobwe mine in the Katanga region of Congo was of great importance as it was the only one at the time that could supply the urgently needed uranium in sufficient quantities for the top-secret US nuclear weapons programme (including the atomic bombs that were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki).

In contrast, the Soviet Union sourced uranium ore for its nuclear arsenal mainly from Kazakhstan and the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The latter describes a blind spot in academic, political, and social discourse. Between 1946 and 1990, a total of 231,000 tonnes of uranium ore were mined in Thuringia and Saxony by SAG Wismut, or SDAG Wismut since 1954, for the former So-

viet and now Russian nuclear weapons programme. During the Cold War, Wismut was one of the fourth largest uranium producers in the world.

Even though the workers at Wismut received above-average salaries, which was also part of the propaganda in the dependency structures of the GDR in order to generate many volunteers for uranium mining and create acceptance among the population, they and succeeding generations still suffer from the consequences of mining. In the first ten extraction years in particular, there was a lack of qualified personnel and occupational health and safety measures, which often led to mining accidents and many workers falling ill with silicosis, due to the high dust exposure during dry drilling. Due to uranium ore extraction, miners experienced heightened exposure to radon and insufficient ventilation, resulting in a disproportionate susceptibility to cancer, notably lung cancer. In addition, many residents of the mining areas, such as in Radiumbad Oberschlema, were displaced and dispossessed without public notice or debate in order to expand uranium mining. Countless people lost their homes, agricultural land was no longer usable and the compensation payments to those affected were not reasonable.

In the mid-1950s, the compulsory system was transformed into an incentive system in order to attract qualified personnel and generate acceptance among the population despite the negative effects. They provided food security, education, cultural life, and healthcare, all under the guise of the political staging of ‘ore for peace’. In spite of the implementation of safety measures, performance targets and collective penalties often compelled workers

to abstain from health and safety standards to reach their daily uranium ore quotas. Uranium mining in the Ore Mountains was top secret; workers had to hand in their IDs and were not allowed to have any contact with the ‘hostile West’, which was strictly controlled and declared a threat to internal security. Those affected were staged and objectified as military heroes against the ‘imperial West’. The provision of infrastructure had the sole purpose of maintaining the oppressive system and keeping the workers ‘fit for work’: because if you are ill and disabled, you cannot mine uranium.

Uranium mining in the Ore Mountains was not economical – without the nuclear arms race, uranium would never have been mined there. But the focus on deterrence and militarised security with the aim of fending off USA’s monopoly led to everything – the economy, society, culture, health, environment, and humanity – being subordinated to the mining of uranium ore. Even though Wismut still has a positive connotation in the region and has an identity-forming effect, it can be shown how uranium mining and nuclear weapons production were of greater importance for the Soviet Union than the safety and health of the workers and residents. A critical review of the past should condemn oppressive structures that objectified those affected without diminishing the complexity and value of the miner’s profession. Those affected are often victimised in an international context and reduced to their lived experience, which denies them their individuality and expertise. Acknowledging diverse realities of life and valuing (local) knowledge offer a pathway to enhance credibility and visibility within the nuclear discourse.

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# Dismantling Nuclear Weapon's Discourse – Understanding Language around Nuclear Weapons from a Feminist Perspective

## Leonie Wanner

Naive, emotional, irrational. Three words that permeate the dominant discourse on nuclear weapons. These three words are highly gendered. Three words commonly used to legitimize nuclear weapons and deterrence through the devaluation of critical voices and dismissing and silencing the lived experiences of affected communities.

Language shapes our categories of thought. The discourse is the linguistic production of reality. In the context of nuclear weapons and deterrence, this implies that language and the discourse surrounding it significantly shape the prevailing reasoning and legitimization of nuclear weapons policy and the nuclear status quo. The current discourse on nuclear weapons and security defines security primarily through defence and peace through nuclear deterrence. This fosters a militarized understanding of security that upholds and validates

the privileges of those in possession of nuclear weapons. Accordingly, this discourse, largely characterized by fear and mistrust, maintains and (re)produces the nuclear status quo. And yet, this is not the end of the story. Added to this is the fact that the language of this discourse is highly gendered, racialized, and militarized. Indeed, the nuclear weapons discourse is deeply rooted in a labyrinth of patriarchy, colonialism, and militarism, reflecting the power imbalances of the current world order. Its language is characterized by “classic patriarchal tactics to deny the realism, rationality, and the lived experience of women and others”. Underlying patriarchal notions of „protection“ and the claimed „objectivity“ and „rationality“ of deterrence weave their way into the dominant narrative, framing any argument against this status quo as naive, emotional, and irrational.

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**MEANWHILE, THE NARRATIVES  
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Moreover, the use of abstract and technos-  
strategic language and euphemisms is quite  
common in this discourse. This jargon dis-  
torts the discourse from the harsh reality of  
nuclear conflict while excluding people who  
do not master the terminology. Paradoxical-  
ly, however, this language constructs the very  
reality from which it seeks to distance itself.  
As a result of this disconnection between the  
language used, and the actual impact, nuclear  
weapons and war are normalized.

Meanwhile, the narratives of affected com-  
munities, the voices of women, youth, and  
other marginalized groups, are systematically  
ignored, dismissed, and not taken seriously.  
So here's the question: What really embodies  
naivety, emotionality, and irrationality? Is it  
the call for disarmament? Or is it the insistence  
on deterrence and the perpetuation of the  
ever-growing nuclear threat?

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*This picture was generated by AI (midjourney). The prompts: nuclear justice*



# Nuclear Disarmament: Is it a Field for All or Only Some?

## Aigerim Seitenova

Ever since I decided to be an international lawyer at the age of 12, I dreamt of setting foot in a United Nations (UN) Headquarters building. Seventeen years later, I hope (if everything goes as planned) I will finally make my dream come true. Back at that time, the UN and any other international platform seemed unreachable, yet I strongly believed that I would contribute to making this world a much better place to live. Little did I know of all the challenges a woman like me will encounter to get there. At the time, I also did not know that there were experts in these apparently unreachable places who discussed the nuclear legacy of the place where I was born, which carries the brunt of nuclear testing conducted over 40 decades.

The multilateral forum seems accessible when everyone refers to diversity, representation, inclusivity, and youth empowerment. Do not get me wrong, I advocate for the mentioned equalities, but over the past years, my only thought is: how do all the international institutions define these words? Who decides when a conference and an event are diverse and representative without falling into the traps of tokenism? How do we all ensure youth have a say and make a difference? How do we break the Global South and North divide?

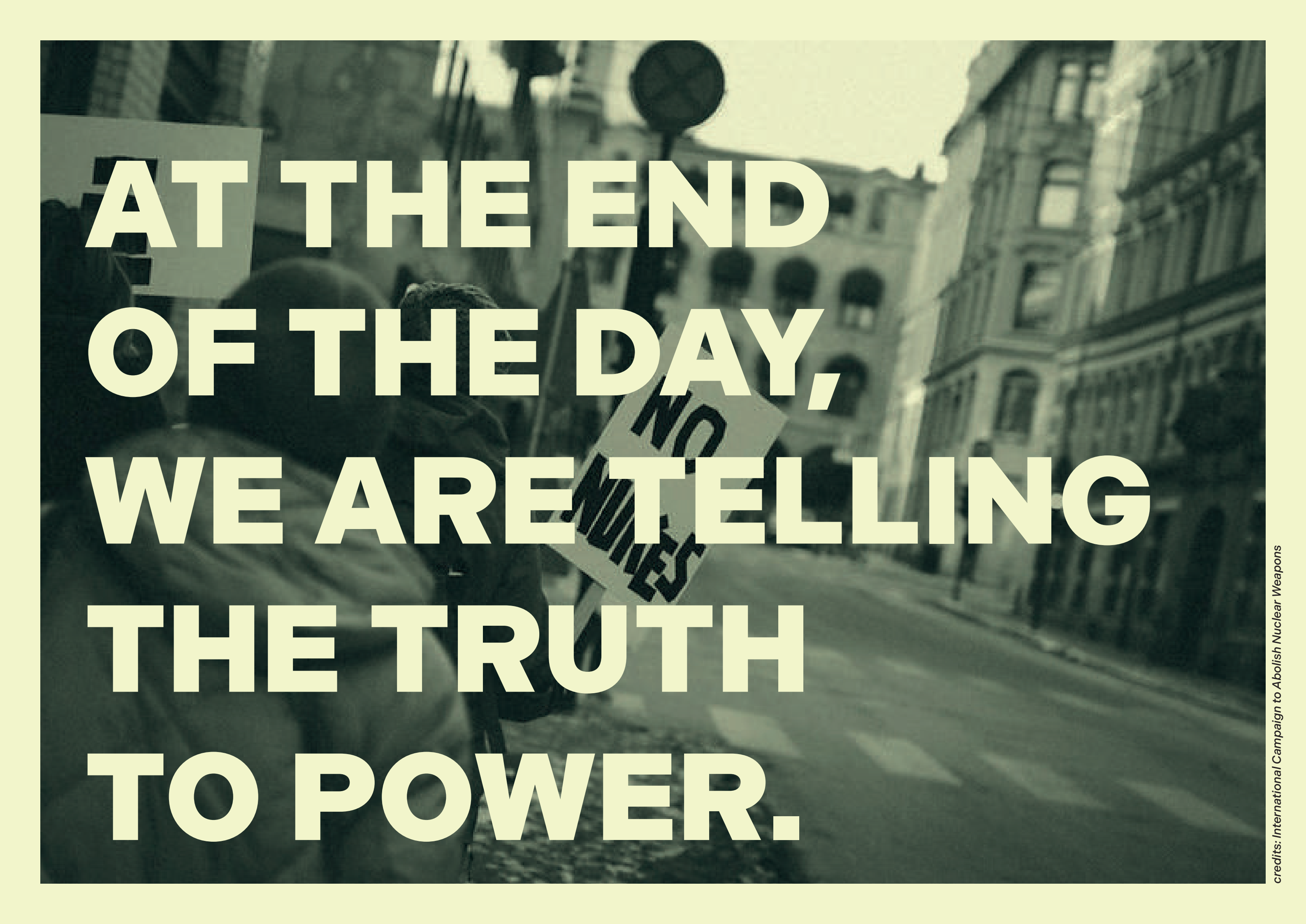
I meet incredible and passionate youth advocates for change at every virtual and in-person event I attend. Advocating for a world free from nuclear weapons is our ultimate goal, which drives us 24/7. Yet, as my fellow friends and colleagues fairly point out, many young people in the field are underfunded, unpaid, and overworked. It is not a secret that most of the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation field is an elitist club of people who graduated from top universities around the world. A golden ticket to the UN is to embark



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is a nuclear disarmament activist and a third-generation survivor of Soviet nuclear testing. Aigerim's interests are centred across intersecting areas such as human rights, disarmament and nuclear colonialism, WPS (women, peace and security) and YPS (youth, peace and security), critical approaches to international law, and peace activism, cross-culture education, decolonial feminism and civil society advocacy. Currently, Aigerim works at the Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy (CFFP) as a project manager, and is based in Germany. Aigerim is one of the founding members of the newly established initiative Steppe Organization for Peace (STOP): Qazaq Youth Initiative for Nuclear Justice.





**AT THE END  
OF THE DAY,  
WE ARE TELLING  
THE TRUTH  
TO POWER.**

on a journey of unpaid internships in the most expensive cities in the world. Of course, it is not the only way, but oftentimes it is a reality many young people simply cannot afford. As a woman of color coming from the Global South, with a passport that limits my access to international multilateral spaces and with no financial means, I feel ‘lucky’ to get this far to advocate for nuclear disarmament. But for all of us, it is not sheer luck but a constant fight to have our voices heard.

For activists from communities affected by nuclear weapons use or testing, this struggle expands beyond just representation, unpaid internships and accessibility of multilateral spaces. It expands to a very real fight for nuclear justice, which has never stopped and has not been achieved. Hegemonic power in the hands of the patriarchal and US- and Europe-centred nuclear politics has created a world where knowledge production in this field is colonial and unequal by its definition. On the margins of it, there are people like myself from communities affected by 20th-century nuclear experiments. Activists impacted by nuclear weapons use or testing (often from indigenous communities) have been fighting against the unjust world order. In addition to nuclear-induced violence and exploitation of our lands, our communities face collective and intergenerational trauma directly linked

to the horrors of nuclear legacy. Maria Lugones, a feminist philosopher, centred two key ideas in her decolonial thinking and theories: resistance to multiple oppressions and coalition against multiple oppressions. Oppression of affected communities has not only hindered our health and bodies but impacted the whole way of living, transpired from one generation to another, destroying the ecosystem and environment. In these inseparable multiple oppressions we find ourselves in, we do not stop resisting. Not in spite, but because we bear the cost of nuclear weapons.

By resisting multiple oppressions, it is important to not be alone in the fight and to have allies by our side. By allowing spaces to create coalitions against multiple oppressions, we can avoid polarisation and fragmentation. The main aim of the colonial project, including the nuclear experiment, was to destroy and separate communities and reinforce the ‘othering’ narrative in which indigenous people’s lives do not hold the same significance as the lives of their hegemons. Our decolonial project now is to create coalitions together and unite our common fight for justice by learning individual and collective stories of those impacted by nuclear weapons, which can be agitating and liberating at the same time.

With the Second Meeting of States Parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons approaching very soon, I have a glimpse of hope that both ideas will be implemented. We are not starting from scratch, thanks to the relentless activism of previous generations of peace activists who paved the way for us. What is urgently needed at this very moment is to break the vicious cycle of marginalisation and falling into dichotomies of “us” vs “them”, “Global North” vs “Global South”, because it leads to paternalism, tokenism and objectivization. For many years, affected communities were already subjects entangled in the nuclear arms race. Our way of achieving justice lies in reminding the world how disastrous nuclear weapons are. And this can be done when affected communities are not being victimised but instead empowered and listened to because we are, at the end of the day, telling the truth to power.

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Olamide  
Samuel

In August 2022, I offered a first-hand account of the impacts of restrictive visa systems on diversity at nuclear policy conferences. I concluded my account by saying “I can only imagine the accessibility implications of hosting TPNW (Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons) 2MSP (Meeting of States Parties) in New York in 2023 and I already dread the thought of having to go through the US visa hurdle, just so I can stay connected to the TPNW review cycle.”

Yet, dismantling existing barriers to entry requires sustained, and collective efforts to dismantle - efforts that require the kind of motivation that can only stem from a direct experience of exclusion. Those with access have not faced this particular visa-flavored experience of exclusion, and many have gained access to policy-makers, in part, due to their ability to interact with them in Western capitals. Passport privilege plays a huge role in this field.

NUCLEAR JUSTICE

New York is too Bougie  
for Some of Us

A lot can and has changed in a year. However, a vast majority of people (of which I am part) can certainly predict that the structural exclusion from decision-making forums will remain for years to come. This certainty does not stem from blind pessimism. After all, it would still take a person 443 days to get a US visa appointment in Lagos, Nigeria. You could travel to the capital (Abuja) to try your luck there – only to discover that it takes a whopping 664 days to secure an interview.

The nuclear policy community is uniquely placed to dismantle visa hurdles. Due to the critical nature of our work, and the relatively small size of the community, many in the community have almost direct access to senior policy-makers with influence over these systems.

So there lies the quandary: How can one change a system when change is instigated in forums outside the reach of changemakers? Perhaps Nikki Hayley might have some advice on this matter.

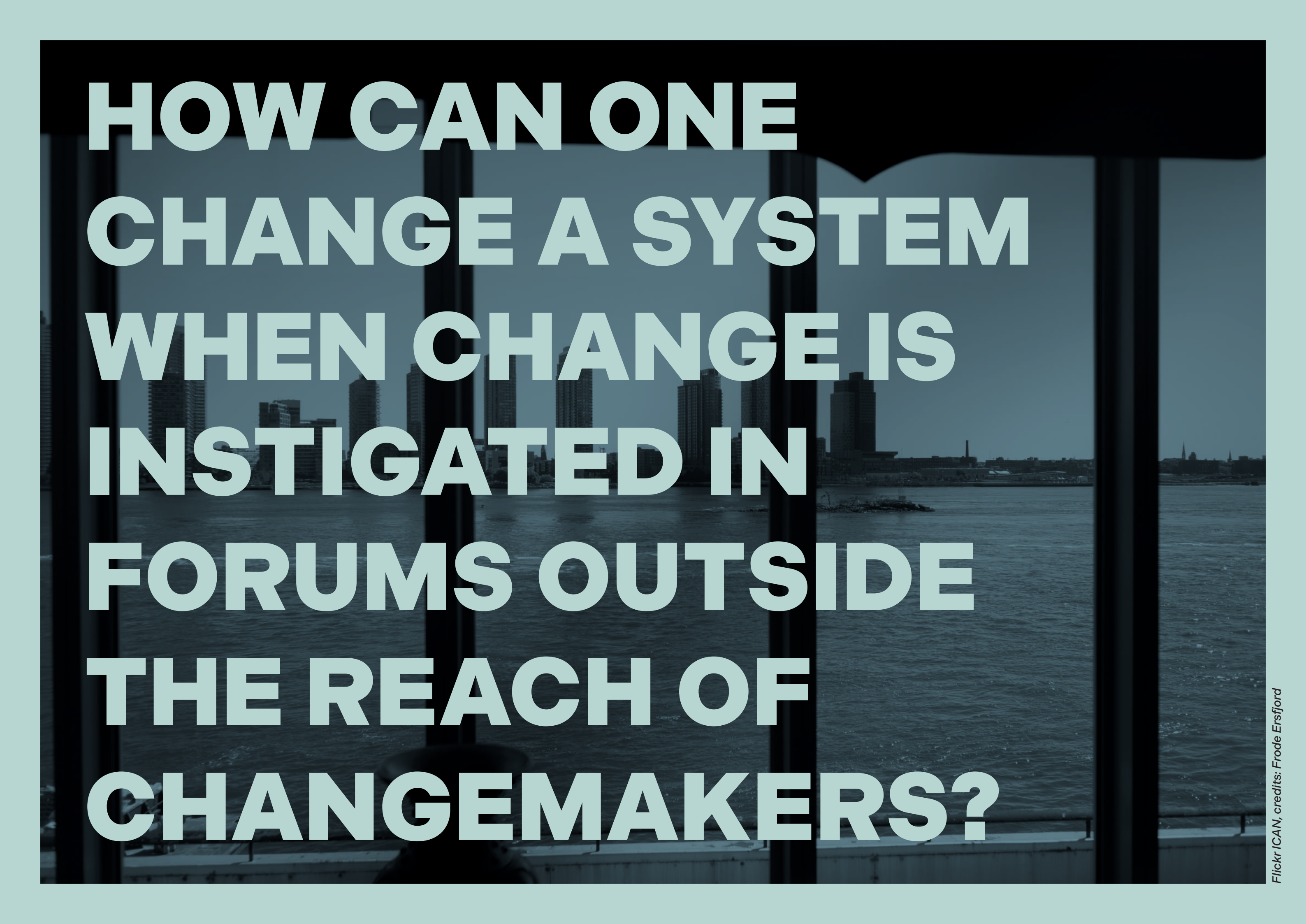
But on a more critical note, and moving beyond individual and subjective experiences of exclusion, we must assess how the visa barrier directly affects nuclear policy. Take the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) for example. The TPNW Meeting of States Parties (MSP) process is rightly hailed as one of the more inclusive processes in the nuclear policy world.



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The background of the image is a photograph of a city skyline, likely New York City, viewed from across a body of water. The view is framed by vertical bars, suggesting it is seen through a window or a screen. The text is overlaid on this image in a large, bold, white font.

**HOW CAN ONE  
CHANGE A SYSTEM  
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At 1MSP held in Vienna in 2022, there was an abundance of non-state and Global South participation in the meeting. Compared to the 370 representatives of state parties and observer states, civil society participants were a whopping 589 individuals. And this had serious implications for the equitable access of women in the treaty process. Without civil society presence, only 29 percent of participants would have been women. Civil society participation brought the percentage of women up to 62.2 percent (I have excluded International Governmental Organizations (IGOs) from these statistics, but of the 44 IGO representatives 45 percent were women).

When we look at ethnic diversity, however, we find a very unique story. There were 74 Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) that operate in a national capacity present at 1MSP. Of these CSOs, only 8 were based in the Global South. As a matter of fact, there were more CSOs from Japan (13) than there were from the rest of the Global South, combined. And this makes sense when you think about passport privilege.

According to the Passport Index, the Japanese passport is ranked 4th most powerful in the world. The Japanese passport allows for Visa-free travel to Austria, and they can get a 90-day electronic Travel Authorisation (eTA) to the United States via a simplified and speedy application process. A Japanese citizen therefore requires only the interest, funds, and a valid passport to attend MSPs. The same is true for every Western country (except for Russia). This is notwithstanding the fact that for every Western state party to the TPNW, there are 10 state parties from the Global South.

When thinking about the implications of passport privilege on nuclear policy spaces such as the MSP, we also have to consider who bears the burden to erase or mitigate the barriers to entry and improve the gendered and ethnic diversity of these conferences. For the TPNW, I find that a lion-share of the fiscal and logistical burden rests on international CSOs such as the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), and International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW). As I explained in my first-hand account last year, these coalitions actively funded and facilitated the participation of numerous individuals.

CSOs in general were the reason for the gender diversity at MSP. But, ICAN and IPPNW were the reasons for ethnic diversity. However, these efforts come at a huge financial cost. In order to ensure the participation of individuals from the Global South, these organisations usually have to fund the prohibitive travel, accommodation, subsistence, and visa application costs, accumulating eye-watering expenses. These are organisations that exist independent of the TPNW and therefore have no recourse to states’ assessed financial contributions to the treaty. These organisations rely on funding from private and institutional donors. Now, given the recent exit of significant funders from the nuclear policy field, I wonder how sustainable this model of inclusion is. Perhaps it is time to consider locating MSPs in more accessible locations, as New York is frankly, too bougie for many of us.

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This brochure stands as a testament to the collaborative spirit that defines our collective commitment to nuclear justice.

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With deepest appreciation,  
ICAN Germany

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