
Lucia Bisceglia (Presidente), Carla Ancona (Vicepresidente), Sonia Brescianini, Serena Broccoli, Michele Marra, Antonello Marras,
Rossella Murtas, Anna Maria Nannavecchia, Matteo Renzi

OPEN LETTER TO THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT

on the urgency of protecting Italy and the world from the nuclear threat and the priority of adhering to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine confirms how wars and armed conflicts are a serious threat to public health and environmental integrity in Europe, as well as in the rest of the world.

As persons working in the biomedical field we would like to stress that any reasoning about just causes of a war loses any hypothetical residual meaning when compared with the destructive potential of modern nuclear technology, the use of which becomes more possible and frightening than ever in the development of the Ukrainian war.

Nuclear weapons cause immediate damage in terms of dead and wounded, which far exceeds the capacity for health care even in well-organized settings. Our health care infrastructure is not and cannot be prepared for the humanitarian catastrophe that would result from the explosion of even a single atomic bomb in one of our cities.

To this immediate damage must be added long-term damage to the health of the population and the environment. Devastating and unmanageable impacts that are beyond the resilience not only of individual countries or territories but of the entire world. As long as these weapons of mass destruction continue to exist, humanity's survival is under threat.

In the face of the destructive potential of nuclear weapons, there is no justification for their use, just as the strategies that employ them for deterrence are nonsense. The very concept of 'defence' is not applicable to the use of nuclear weapons which, by their very nature, clearly violate all the principles of proportionality and protection of civilians, of the distinction between combatants and non-combatants, enshrined in international law through the protocols of the Geneva Conventions.

Italy is one of five North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) members to host US nuclear weapons on its territory as part of a nuclear sharing agreement. Italy hosts not less than 40 B61 nuclear bombs, allegedly stored at the Aviano and Ghedi bases¹.

On 7 July 2017, a historic global agreement to ban nuclear weapons was adopted, known as the United Nations Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)². It entered into force on 22 January 2021, filling a significant void in international law.

¹ ICAN: How is your country doing? Italy, <https://www.icanw.org/italy>

² ICAN, Full text of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, https://www.icanw.org/tpnw_full_text

The Treaty prohibits nations from developing, testing, producing, manufacturing, transferring, possessing, stockpiling, using or threatening the use of nuclear weapons, or allowing nuclear weapons to be placed on their territory.

A country, such as Italy, that hosts another state's nuclear weapons on its territory can adhere to the TPNW, provided it agrees to remove them within a specified deadline.

At present, Italy has not yet signed the TPNW, however in September 2017, the Italian parliament adopted a resolution¹ instructing the government to "explore the possibility" of becoming a state party to the treaty. In October 2017, Luigi Di Maio, before taking office as foreign minister, pledged with 246 other parliamentarians to work towards the signing and ratification of the treaty³. Former Italian Prime Minister Enrico Letta and former Foreign Minister Franco Frattini signed an open letter in September 2020 asking current leaders to "show courage and boldness and join the treaty"⁴.

We believe that Italy's signing and ratifying the treaty is a necessary and urgent act. Every day of war in Ukraine increases the risk that the conflict will spread and nuclear weapons will be used. Signing the TPNW is not only necessary to guarantee Italy's security, but would also send an international signal of de-escalation.

The first meeting of states on the TPNW will take place in Vienna from 21 to 23 June⁵. The event is organized by ICAN (Nobel Prize 2017), the International Campaign for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons, an organization committed to the same cause as the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW, Nobel Prize 1985).

On 18 May 2022, the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Chamber of Deputies passed a resolution⁶ committing the government 'to consider Italy's participation as an "observer country" at the First Meeting of the States Parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)'.

As people committed to research, protection and promotion of global health, we urge the Italian government to definitely attend this meeting with the ultimate goal of signing and ratifying the treaty as soon as possible, consistent with the previously expressed declarations of intent.

The conflict in Ukraine has made it clear that nuclear war may be closer than ever. The only solution is to give priority to nuclear disarmament. This is, in our view, the only coherent choice for a government committed to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Certain that the reasons behind our appeal will be understood, we hope that important steps will be taken in the direction suggested,

The board of the Italian Association of Epidemiology (AIE)
The AIE-Peace Working Group

³ ICAN, Full list of pledge takers, https://pledge.icanw.org/full_list_of_pledge_takers

⁴ Open Letter in Support of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, https://d3n8a8pro7vbm.cloudfront.net/ican/pages/1712/attachments/original/1600645499/TPNW_Open_Letter_-_English.pdf

⁵ ICAN, First Meeting of Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty set for June, https://www.icanw.org/tpnw_first_meeting_of_states_parties_june_2022

⁶ <http://documenti.camera.it/leg18/resoconti/commissioni/bollettini/html/2022/04/21/03/allegato.htm#>