

Open Letter to Minister Jean Asselborn

More than 20 years after the end of the Cold War, and nearly 70 years after nuclear weapons were first used on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, there are still over 16,000 such weapons in the world, including several hundred ready for use within minutes of a command. In light of the catastrophic humanitarian and environmental consequences of nuclear weapons, we as déi jonk gréng and ICAN reaffirm our commitment to achieving a world free of such weapons.

For many years, there has been little to no progress in multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations, and the pace of nuclear disarmament is slowing down at a significant and disconcerting rate. This development is epitomised by the 17-year long deadlock in the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva and by the failure of the parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to fulfil the nuclear disarmament obligations required by the Treaty.

In recent years, we have seen the emergence of a series of initiatives highlighting the humanitarian and environmental impact of nuclear weapons. The fact-based discussions that took place at the first and second Conferences on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, convened respectively by Norway in March 2013 and by Mexico in February this year, have demonstrated that the effects of a single nuclear weapon detonation, whether through accidental or intentional use, will be catastrophic for people and environment. Even a limited nuclear war would cause a climate cooling to such an extent that the following famine could kill 1-2 billion people. [1]

The broad participation at those Conferences, with attendance most recently in Nayarit, Mexico, by 146 states, the International Committee of the Red Cross, a number of UN humanitarian organisations and civil society, reflected the recognition that the continued existence and deployment of nuclear weapons is a fundamental and global concern. We warmly welcome Austria's announcement of a third Conference on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons, scheduled for 8-9 December 2014.

We believe that recent initiatives highlighting the humanitarian and environmental impact of nuclear weapons provide a unique opportunity for states and civil society to reach new international standards and norms, through a legally binding instrument prohibiting nuclear weapons. We note that nuclear weapons are the only weapons of mass destruction not yet prohibited in a universally applicable international treaty. Experience with other categories of weapons demonstrates that the elimination of weapons follows international agreements to ban them.

On this basis, we call on the Luxembourg government to:

1. Participate in an active and constructive manner at the Third International Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons in Vienna, Austria on 8-9 December 2014.
2. Highlight the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons and the need for a new legal instrument prohibiting nuclear weapons in relevant international forums, including at the 2015 NPT Review Conference.
3. Support the immediate start of negotiations for a new legal instrument prohibiting nuclear weapons as a first step towards their complete elimination. The fact that there is no explicit legal prohibition against nuclear weapons constitutes a legal anomaly among weapons of mass destruction. A new instrument prohibiting nuclear weapons would establish a strong international norm against further use, possession and deployment of nuclear weapons. A diplomatic process to achieve such an instrument should be open to all states and blockable by none, and should therefore start even if states with nuclear weapons refuse to participate.

[1] Study by International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW), 2013, second edition, LINK: <http://www.ippnw.org/pdf/nuclear-famine-two-billion-at-risk-2013.pdf>