

ICAN wins the Nobel Peace Prize for work on UN nuclear weapons ban treaty

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The Nobel Peace Prize has been awarded to the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, or ICAN, the Switzerland-based coalition of civil society groups that led successful efforts to approve a nuclear weapons ban treaty. The UN voted in favor of the treaty in July; it will take effect 90 days after 50 countries ratify it. So far, three have done so.

“It is now 71 years since the UN General Assembly, in its very first resolution, advocated the importance of nuclear disarmament and a nuclear weapon-free world,” the Norwegian Nobel Committee wrote [[1](#)]. “With this year’s award, the [committee] wishes to pay tribute to ICAN for giving new momentum to the efforts to achieve this goal.”

The ban treaty was approved despite vigorous opposition from the United States and other nuclear weapons countries that boycotted treaty negotiations; some of those countries, in the words of the *New York Times*’ Rick Gladstone, “denounced the treaty as a naïve and dangerous diversion.”

The *Times* covered the award with a straightforward account that included this quote from an ICAN statement: “This prize is a tribute to the tireless efforts of many millions of campaigners and concerned citizens worldwide who, ever since the dawn of the atomic age, have loudly protested nuclear weapons, insisting that they can serve no legitimate purpose and must be forever banished from the face of our earth.”

Some other major media outlets were less balanced and thoughtful. The Economist wins some kind of prize for snarkiest headline of the day with: “This year’s Nobel peace prize rewards a nice but pointless idea.” The *Washington Post* (which devoted one paragraph to the adoption of the nuclear weapons ban treaty in July) receives an honorable mention certificate in the passive-aggressive category for “The Nobel Peace Prize for an anti-nuclear-weapons group probably won’t please the U.S.”

If you want to know why ICAN and its partner organizations in more than 100 countries deserved this award many times over—why the weapons ban treaty is so much more than (and anything but) a pointless irritant to the United States—read the Nobel committee’s ringing award letter. Especially these three sentences:

“The Norwegian Nobel Committee is aware that an international legal prohibition will not in itself eliminate a single nuclear weapon, and that so far neither the states that already have nuclear weapons nor their closest allies support the nuclear weapon ban treaty. The Committee wishes to emphasize that the next steps towards attaining a world free of nuclear weapons must involve the nuclear-armed states. This year’s Peace Prize is therefore also a call upon these states to initiate serious negotiations with a view to the gradual, balanced and carefully monitored elimination of the almost 15,000 nuclear weapons in the world.”

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P.S.

* <http://thebulletin.org/ican-wins-nobel-peace-prize-work-nuclear-weapons-ban-treaty11171>

Footnotes

[1] https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2017/press.html