Address to the opening session of the First Meeting of States Parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

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Mr. President, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Seven and a half years ago, governments and civil society gathered here in Vienna for the 2014 Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons. At the conclusion of that conference, the government of Austria launched what would become the Humanitarian Pledge. The governments endorsing this pledge called on states “to identify and pursue effective measures to fill the legal gap for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons”. They pledged “to cooperate with all relevant stakeholders, States, international organisations, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movements, parliamentarians and civil society, in efforts to stigmatise, prohibit and eliminate nuclear weapons in light of their unacceptable humanitarian consequences and associated risks”.

And this is exactly what they did. Exactly what you, the states parties and signatories to this Treaty, did. In the face of scepticism and doubts. In the face of decades of inertia and paralysis in multilateral disarmament. In the face of bitter and sometimes underhanded opposition from some of the world’s most powerful countries. Cooperating with survivors and impacted communities, civil society and all relevant stakeholders as you had pledged, you negotiated, and adopted, and brought into force a treaty banning nuclear weapons.

With the entry into force of the Treaty in January 2021, the legal gap is filled. Nuclear weapons are comprehensively prohibited under international law, as the other weapons of mass destruction have been for decades. This is an extraordinary and transformative achievement. On behalf of ICAN and its 635 partner organisations, I would like to express our profound gratitude to the states parties, the signatories, and all the other governments which worked with such determination to bring this treaty into being.

And the need for the treaty is clearer and more urgent than ever. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and its threats to use nuclear weapons have increased the already unacceptable risks of use, and brought the terrible prospect of nuclear war and the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of the use of nuclear weapons to the forefront.
of public consciousness. The TPNW community must act decisively against such threats, and do everything possible to prevent the use of nuclear weapons.

So while we join you in celebrating this moment, there is no time to be lost. What we have prohibited, we must now work to eliminate. As we cooperated to make the treaty, we must now work together to implement it. With determination and energy, during this meeting, and in the months and years ahead. We in civil society will work with you to implement your national obligations, and to develop the mechanisms for assisting survivors of use or testing of nuclear weapons, and for remediating environmental contamination. We will work with you to persuade all states to join the Treaty. We will work with you to raise awareness and broaden understanding of the true consequences of any use of nuclear weapons. And we will work with you, in every setting and every channel, to stigmatize and de-legitimize nuclear weapons, and to strengthen the norm embodied in the Treaty.

There is a long road before us, but we are ready. We look forward to working with you.

Thank you.