

Dear Senator/Representative,

Presidents from both political parties have declared the United States has a special obligation to show leadership in the world on nuclear nonproliferation.

Unfortunately, if we are leading at all these days, it is in the wrong direction.

Increases in the budget for nuclear weapons, a commitment to spend trillions to “modernize” the US nuclear program—build new bomb plants, design new warheads, create new missiles, and manufacture new nuclear submarines—these things have triggered a new global nuclear arms race.

This is not a trivial thing—the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists have set the hands of the Doomsday Clock at 100 seconds to midnight. The dangers posed by nuclear weapons have never been greater.

I am writing to urge you to make the US a leader in the effort to control and eliminate nuclear weapons. On January 22, 2021, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons will enter into force, and nuclear weapons will be declared illegal under international law.

Our country has boycotted the TPNW process and says, because we have not signed the Treaty, it has no legal power in the US. Technically, this is true. But the Treaty has moral force. More than half the world’s nations voted to approve the Treaty—they want us and other nuclear nations to keep the promise we made in 1970 in the Nonproliferation Treaty—to pursue complete disarmament “at an early date.”

The TPNW represents the frustration and well-founded fear of non-nuclear nations. It is hard to argue they are wrong when they suspect, after fifty years, that we do not intend to keep that promise. So they speak, in the TPNW, with powerful force.

The preamble of the Treaty says, “Deeply concerned about the catastrophic humanitarian consequences that would result from any use of nuclear weapons, and recognizing the consequent need to completely eliminate such weapons, which remains the only way to guarantee that nuclear weapons are never used again under any circumstances...”

Signing the Treaty will not make nuclear weapons disappear. But it would put the United States inexorably on the path to a safer and more secure world for all of us. We would be able to show leadership—and history shows us the other nuclear weapons states will follow.

Eighteen days into the new Congress, the TPNW will enter into force. It is likely that at least one bill will be entered in the House and the Senate urging the US to engage with the Treaty. I urge you to be a co-sponsor of that bill. The responsibility to address the single greatest existential threat confronting humanity is a great one. Few people on the planet have the power to take effective action to make us all safer. You are one of them.

Please act, for the sake of all of us.