TPNW, the Caribbean and the Disarmament Politics of Small Island States

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ABSTRACT
The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) is a historic achievement of many years of sustained advocacy and diplomacy by a deft coalition of governments, intergovernmental organizations and civil society. This was done against all odds and in the face of staunch opposition from nuclear weapon states and their allies. The TPNW’s adoption is viewed in some quarters as a revolt or uprising by a majority of nations in the realm of disarmament politics. This majority included the small island states of the English-speaking Caribbean Community (CARICOM) who, despite the constraints of size and its concomitant challenges, were outspoken and active players throughout the TPNW’s negotiating process. These small island states exerted influence beyond their size in helping to deconstruct and reframe the discourse on disarmament politics to reclaim and advance the international agenda to prohibit and stigmatize nuclear weapons. Their participation, empowered by the humanitarian initiative on nuclear weapons, demonstrates that resolute leadership, transparency and inclusive participation are the key determinants of a new pathway to achieve progress on nuclear disarmament. This commentary examines the contribution of the CARICOM small island states, as part of the wider Latin America and Caribbean group, in challenging the status quo in disarmament politics towards the adoption of the TPNW.

Introduction

We don’t want no nuclear war, with nuclear war we won’t get far. I said that we don’t want no nuclear war, with nuclear war we won’t get far . . . They want to live in peace and happiness. Let the trees grow. Let the waters flow . . .

- No Nuclear War, Album by Peter Tosh (Jamaican reggae singer), September 1987

On 7 July 2017, the majority of the world’s nations took a decisive step to rid the world of nuclear weapons by adopting the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). The Treaty not only prohibits all nuclear weapon-related activities but it also sets out measures for disarmament, addresses victims’ assistance and environmental

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1The lyrics of this song against nuclear war by Peter Tosh are written in Jamaican dialect in which a double negative is used as a positive for emphasis.

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remediation, acknowledges that women must play an equal role in arms reduction and the disproportionate impact of these weapons on women and indigenous people, as well as the importance of peace and disarmament education.\(^2\)

The TPNW is a historic achievement; the culmination of many years of sustained advocacy and diplomacy by a deft coalition of governments, intergovernmental organizations, and civil society. This was done against all odds and in the face of staunch opposition from nuclear weapon states (NWS) and their allies. In fact, some have called this achievement for global democracy a revolt or uprising by a majority of nations. In mounting a strong response to the two decades-long paralysis in nuclear disarmament negotiations, non-nuclear-weapon states (NNWS) took action on this issue without the permission or the participation of the NWS. Moreover, they took the negotiations outside the traditional venues: the NPT review process and the Conference on Disarmament (CD) where the NWS exerted control. As Harald Müller and Carmen Wunderlich have observed, “the TPNW ... represents a new approach to nuclear disarmament: rather than being hapless bystanders, the have-nots came together and produced an international disarmament treaty without the [NWS] ... or their allies. What looks, for the NWS, like an undesirable intrusion onto their turf represents, for ban supporters, an act of self-empowerment in an area they regard as crucial to their own security and survival” (Müller and Wunderlich 2020, 171).

From the outset, the small island states of the English-Speaking Caribbean (CARICOM) were a part of this uprising; becoming increasingly outspoken and actively engaged in efforts to secure a categorical ban on nuclear weapons. In doing so, these States joined other NNWS, intergovernmental organizations and civil society actors in taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations leading to the negotiation and adoption of the TPNW (International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) 2019a).

In this commentary, I look at the TPNW from the perspective of the small island states of the Caribbean region. In doing so, I highlight the factors underpinning their active engagement as well as the nature and influence of their participation in the negotiating process. These are examined here to show how the Treaty levelled the playing field in disarmament politics and diplomacy, bringing onboard a diverse group of actors to reclaim the international agenda to prohibit and stigmatize nuclear weapons. The principles of equality and justice are at the core of this approach as well as the highly relevant gender perspective.

**Rationale for Caribbean’s Engagement**

Nuclear disarmament is not the traditional area of focus for the English-speaking Caribbean region, which is usually concerned about conventional arms control, in particular small arms. Nonetheless, the small island states of the Caribbean have a longstanding commitment to and support for a world free of nuclear weapons and the call for action on nuclear disarmament. As strong proponents of multilateralism, their position is that the issue of full and verifiable nuclear disarmament is of importance

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\(^2\)For the text, see United Nations, Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. https://treaties.unoda.org/t/tpnw.
to all states regardless of their size or military or economic status. In addition, they have consistently advanced the view that the implications of nuclear catastrophe are troubling to all states because of the capacity for global annihilation that nuclear arsenals represent.

Against this backdrop, the decision of the CARICOM small island states to become actively engaged in the TPNW negotiating process can be largely explained by three interrelated factors. The first involved the re-emergence of the humanitarian approach to disarmament and its alignment with CARICOM’s traditional view of disarmament and security. The second determining factor can be attributed to the strong interest among the majority of NNWS for meaningful progress on the nuclear disarmament pillar of the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). And thirdly, as States Parties to the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean (Treaty of Tlatelolco), CARICOM states possess the credentials to provide political and moral leadership for a world free of nuclear weapons. The three factors are examined in turn.

Alignment with the humanitarian-impact Approach

In 2010, led by the International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC), the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons Initiative emerged and sought to shift the debate on nuclear disarmament from a focus solely on the security dimensions to the humanitarian and environmental impact (Kmentt 2015, 683). This paradigm shift resonates strongly with the position of the small island states of the English-Speaking Caribbean which have long advocated for a holistic approach to addressing matters of peace and security, recognizing fully the intrinsic link between peace, security, and development.

The CARICOM states have consistently argued that “the classical and relatively narrow concept of peace and security cannot be neatly applied to the multidimensional security threats that confront [them]” (Miller 2015). Rooted in an expansive concept of security, the region therefore views disarmament and arms control through the prism of humanitarian and human security considerations rather than the military/national security posture. Simply put, for these small island states, disarmament is about people, not the weapons. Forestalling human suffering is therefore at the center of their concerns.

Naturally, the Humanitarian Initiative embodies the thinking of Caribbean states as it has brought to the fore the unacceptable humanitarian consequences of a nuclear weapon detonation and the impossibility of any adequate humanitarian response. Like all small island states, CARICOM States view the prospect of a nuclear detonation, whether by design, accident, or negligence, as an existential horror that could decimate the entire Caribbean region (King 2014).

CARICOM has voiced deep concerns about the humanitarian impact of these weapons and the long-term consequences of a nuclear detonation for public health, food security, social services, infrastructure, environmental assets, and the psychological well-being of their citizens (Rattray 2015). The reality is that nuclear detonation knows no borders. The countries in the region would be disproportionately impacted. For these states, prevention is the only option given that very survival of humanity is at stake.

\(^3\)For CARICOM’s view of security, see especially Ishmael (2002); Braveboy-Wagner (2008).
Against this real and existential threat, CARICOM states joined international efforts to place humanitarian concerns at the forefront of the discourse and action on nuclear weapons. Importantly, the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons Initiative provided NNWS, including the Caribbean small island states, with a platform for demanding that their concerns are placed on equal footing with the security considerations of nuclear-armed States and their allies. As Gro Nystuen and Stein-Ivar Lothe Eide highlighted “having left the issue of nuclear disarmament to the good faith of the nuclear-armed states for decades, the vast majority of the United Nations Member States has remained largely disenfranchised. With the humanitarian discourse on nuclear weapons, however, the non-nuclear weapons States have been empowered and are laying the groundwork for re-entering these discussions” (Nystuen and Lothe Eide 2013).

The Humanitarian Initiative therefore empowered the Caribbean small island states and other NNWS to reject the status quo in disarmament politics and set the stage for progress towards the abolition of nuclear weapons and away from a traditional focus on “strategic stability” which had prevailed in the nuclear weapons discourse for decades. Consequently, CARICOM joined other NNWS in drawing attention to the “legal gap” in the nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament regime. In doing so, they were among the 121 states that endorsed the Humanitarian Pledge issued by the Government of Austria in 2014, to “fill the legal gap for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons” (Austria 2015).

During the TPNW process, CARICOM states asserted that the humanitarian approach gives the international community of states, large or small, developed or developing, nuclear armed or non-nuclear weapon states and civil society, an opportunity to pursue a new approach to accelerate collective efforts to rid the world of nuclear weapons and that the principles of equality and justice were at the core of this new approach.

The Treaty Tlatelolco: Inspiring Political and Moral Leadership

The small island states of the Caribbean and their Latin American partners are no strangers to leading the way on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation inspired by the historic achievement of the Tlatelolco Treaty. All 33 states of the region are States Parties to this pioneering regional prohibition treaty that gave rise to the first Nuclear Weapon-Free-Zone in a densely populated area. Under the Treaty of Tlatelolco, these states have agreed to the prohibition and prevention of the “testing, use, manufacture, production or acquisition by any means whatsoever of any nuclear weapons” and the “receipt, storage, installation, deployment and any form of possession of any nuclear weapons”⁴ In essence, prohibition is in the DNA of Latin America and the Caribbean which the region harnessed in leading the charge for the TPNW.

As a former Secretary-General of Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean (OPANAL), Ambassador Luiz Filipe de Macedo Soares, pointed out in his statement to the First Committee during the 69th Session of UN General Assembly in 2014: “Latin America and the Caribbean brought to world peace and security an inestimable and truly innovative contribution. A space equivalent

⁴For text of the Treaty of Tlatelolco, see https://www.opanal.org/en/text-of-the-treaty-of-tlatelolco/.
to 20 million square kilometers, which is home to about 600 million people, has been kept free of nuclear weapons. Not a single country in the region is party to any military alliance based on nuclear weapons” (Soares 2014).

These political credentials allowed the states of the Latin America and Caribbean Community (CELAC) to provide strong political and moral leadership in the TPNW process. The Humanitarian Initiative also reinvigorated the long-standing efforts of CELAC and created a new space for the region to play a leadership role in developing effective legal measures to attain and maintain a world without nuclear weapons. It is not surprising therefore that these states, including CARICOM states, have become increasingly active and outspoken in the debates and initiatives in favour of a world free of nuclear weapons.

As stated in the preamble of the Treaty of Tlatelolco, “the privileged situation of the Signatory States, whose territories are wholly free from nuclear weapons, imposes on them the inescapable duty of preserving that situation both in their own interests and for the good of mankind”. CARICOM and fellow CELAC partners have taken this duty seriously and were therefore among the main sponsors of UNGA Res. 70/33 (2015) which established the Open-ended Working Group on taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations. This action also reflected the high-level of political commitment of CELAC Heads of State and Government, articulated at the 2015 and 2016 CELAC Summits in Costa Rica and Ecuador respectively, to taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations, including through the endorsement of the Humanitarian Pledge and the commencement of negotiations for a legally binding international instrument prohibiting nuclear weapons.

In making the case for the TPNW, as States Parties to the Treaty of Tlatelolco, they advocated for more “rational” alternatives in addressing security concerns than to rely on doctrines of so-called strategic stability and nuclear deterrence, which are based upon the constant threat of mutual annihilation. The negotiating posture of the Latin America and Caribbean region was also deeply rooted in their firm conviction that the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons would be a violation of the Charter of the United Nations, a crime against humanity, and constitute a violation of International Law, including Humanitarian Law.

At the core of their efforts to influence the TPNW’s outcome was the strong belief and argument that a treaty on prohibition would clarify the legal status of nuclear weapons use and obligations (Richards 2016a). Moreover, it would create a much stronger norm against nuclear weapons use and possession, stigmatizing the weapons and their advocates and undercutting the status, value and deterrence roles attached to these weapons.

Full and Effective Implementation of the NPT

As States Parties to the NPT, CARICOM states have remained committed to the full and effective implementation of the Treaty’s three pillars and to its universalization. These small island states have long supported calls for and initiatives to pursue legal

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5 The recommendation of the August 2016 session of this Open-ended Working Group (OEWG) was the basis for the launching of the TPNW negotiating conference in 2017.

6 Statement of the delegation of Trinidad and Tobago on behalf of CARICOM to the UN General Assembly First Committee, New York, 7 October 2014.
undertakings to advance the effective measures for nuclear disarmament stipulated in Article VI of the Treaty given the chronic lack of implementation by the NWS of this key provision of the global regime.

Though ardent supporters of the NPT, CARICOM small states were also among the many NNWS which have frequently criticized the Treaty for having essentially preserved the Cold War status quo. And they increasingly expressed their dissatisfaction and frustration with the failure of the NWS to live up to their unequivocal obligations to implement the nuclear disarmament provisions contained in Article VI of the Treaty. As such, they expressed their heightened concern that this goal remained elusive and rejected attempts to assert a right to indefinite possession of nuclear weapons by NWS or to justify the continued retention of nuclear weapons on security grounds. In its statement to the 2015 NPT Review Conference, CARICOM lamented the fact that 45 years after the entry into force of the NPT and 25 years after its indefinite extension, the international community was still unable to undertake negotiations in good faith on nuclear disarmament (Rattray 2015).

Against this background, CARICOM stood among the group of NNWS who were no longer content to accept the status quo in nuclear disarmament; whereby they would continue, in a ritualistic manner, to voice concern and frustration year after year, in fora after fora about the lack of progress in the disarmament pillar of the NPT, or at the chronic stalemate at the political and diplomatic levels that have impeded the international community to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations. They were of the view that for far too long, they had been complicit in maintaining this unacceptable status quo. In that vein, they were committed to working with other NNWS to break the deadlock and establish a different approach; one that was conducive to taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations.

Buoyed by the Humanitarian Initiative, these small island states therefore joined a majority of other NNWS in questioning NWS about their intention to implement their part of the NPT’s “grand bargain”, namely, to completely eliminate their own nuclear arsenals. They pointed to the growing loss of faith in this global regime and argued that failure to implement, in either letter of spirit, the “grand bargain”, which enabled the coming into being of the NPT, as well as the backtracking on commitments freely undertaken would keep us all on the brink of massive nuclear violence and threatens the very survival of humanity in perpetuity (Richards 2016b).

Furthermore, CARICOM states were also concerned that the NWS were willfully championing the status quo of indefinite possession which they deem to be in the interest of security and stability. These small island states further questioned the NWS’ notion of security as well as their fabulist notion that world will forever escape a nuclear catastrophe, noting that in the Latin America and the Caribbean region such a fantasy is called “magical realism”.

CARICOM also forcefully argued against the NWS’ constant criticism that the negotiation of the TPNW would undermine the NPT and block progress in nuclear disarmament. Accordingly, they asserted that the TPNW would supplement rather than undermine the NPT; and argued that the categorical prohibition of these weapons was consistent with the NPT and would only help to achieve the treaty’s goals.
The TPNW Process: Participation of Small Island States

Against the backdrop of political will forged by a longstanding commitment to nuclear abolition as States Parties to the Treaty of Tlatelolco and the NPT and driven by deep concerns about the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons, CARICOM states decided to play a leading role in the negotiation and adoption of the TPNW. Their action was also underpinned by an unwavering commitment to multilateralism and the rule of law as pathways to peace, security, and development. To this end and despite the inherent challenges of “smallness” that typically confront small states middle income and low-income states, CARICOM states were very active and often influential players during the various stages of the process, including in the 2016 Open-ended Working Group on taking forward multilateral negotiations (OWEG) and during the negotiating conference in 2017. With the levelling of disarmament politics, CARICOM states were especially pleased that a representative from Costa Rica – a small state long committed to the cause of nuclear disarmament – would preside over the historic UN Conference to negotiate a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons with the election of Ambassador Elayne Whyte Gómez, Permanent Representative of Costa Rica to the UN Office at Geneva.

Generally, small states and low-income countries have fewer resources to devote to multilateral fora. They therefore face barriers to participation. They do not have specialist disarmament representatives and more over in most cases the issue is not a pressing priority in their Capitals. As the 2007 study by Kappeler (2007) shows “smallness” contributes to a state’s diplomatic challenges and can impact negatively on their effectiveness in negotiations. This reinforces the widespread perception of small states as peripheral actors in the international system.

According to Callixtus Josephs, “many studies on small island states have also identified a number of inherent and permanent features that are associated with negotiations hindrances due to vulnerability. These include fewer resources, weak institutional structures, less information, less specialized staff to serve different phases of the negotiations and power asymmetries among other limitations” (Josephs 2013). He also pointed to the reactive diplomacy of small states, noting that “it has also been generally established in literature that small states are reactive, not proactive” (Josephs 2013, 96).

Given the very limited technical, human and financial resources, how were the small island states of the Caribbean able to participate actively in the TPNW process? This they did principally by being reliable and proactive players through strategic negotiation planning. This approach was effectively leveraged from the experience they had garnered as active and influential players in the negotiations of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), which had been adopted two years earlier. In the ATT negotiation, which was a major foreign policy priority for CARICOM, these small island states successfully acted as a cohesive collective regional bloc along with other CELAC states thereby advancing functional cooperation; optimizing their limited diplomatic instruments and resources; and forming alliances with other like-minded states as well as working closely with civil society. In the case of the TPNW, they utilized the same strategy—forming alliances with like-minded states within the Non-Aligned Movement such as Indonesia, Malaysia and South Africa and states in the New Agenda Coalition including New Zealand as well as partnering closely with civil society.
Through their consistent and active presence, they gained legitimacy and expertise in the process, which made it possible for them to maneuver effectively. Moreover, these small island states were actively involved in the dual-track approach to highlight the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons (Kmentt 2015, 685). This included the more novel track two—a series of international conferences involving representatives from both civil society and states engaging in discussions on different aspects of the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons (Potter 2017). Accordingly, CARICOM states participated in the three international conferences on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons in Oslo (March 2013), Nayarit (February 2014) and Vienna (December 2014).

Notably, the region was proactive in the dynamic ban treaty movement arising from the initial meeting in 2013 between the Latin America and Caribbean arm of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) and CARICOM UN General Assembly First Committee experts in New York, to discuss the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons detonation, and subsequent engagements. CARICOM states were fully supportive of the humanitarian initiative from the outset, with Jamaica being one of the first countries to host, in collaboration with ICAN, a regional roundtable on the question of how to address the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons, including by means of a treaty banning nuclear weapons. This roundtable, convened in Montego Bay in August 2014, served to develop CARICOM’s technical knowledge, and to build awareness as well as prepare the CARICOM region to contribute actively towards advancing the humanitarian initiative on nuclear weapons.

CARICOM also lent political support to driving the TPNW process forward and readily sponsored and co-sponsored the relevant statements and resolutions in the UN First Committee. CARICOM states also worked closely together with and participated in several strategy sessions with like-minded states and civil society, including at the November 2015 regional roundtable meeting on the progress towards a treaty banning nuclear weapons held in San José, Costa Rica. At this strategy session organized by the Government of Costa Rica in collaboration with ICAN, Jamaica proactively presented the elements of a treaty on prohibition that would inform the deliberations of the OWEG in May 2016.

Importantly, these small island states were also able to draw on the technical work of civil society, academia and think tanks. Civil society was an invaluable source of knowledge and expertise and as mentioned above, Jamaica hosted one of the first regional roundtables on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons. This workshop, which was organized in collaboration with ICAN, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and the International Law and Policy Institute of Norway, was part of the strategy for international capacity building.

Of significance is that CARICOM, in partnership with civil society, played an important role in ensuring the inclusion of language in the TPNW’s negotiating text on environmental remediation and victims’ assistance, provisions which are at the core of this humanitarian disarmament treaty. During the first session of the UN diplomatic conference in March 2017, CARICOM states, represented by the delegation of Antigua and Barbuda, called for the treaty to include “positive provisions that address human and environmental harms, recognize rights and offer remedial measures to victims. These provisions should include environmental remediation, risk education, victim/survivor assistance and stockpile destruction” (ICAN 2019a, 1). According to Matthew Breay
Bolton and Elizabeth Minor, “... the conference Chair, Ambassador Elayne Whyte Gomez of Costa Rica, and her staff could not ignore the concerns of 15 CARICOM states (plus the additional 12 that called for positive obligations) ... as they wrote the first draft of the treaty” (Bolton and Minor 2020). As ICAN noted, “these elements were ultimately included in the TPNW, reflecting the engagement of CARICOM member states” (ICAN 2019, 1).

**Influencing the Outcome of the OEWG’s Second Session**

A highlight of CARICOM’s influence in helping to shape the outcome in TPNW process was its robust participation in the defining second session of the Open-ended Working Group on taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations (OEWG) held in Geneva in May 2016. The OEWG was charged with substantively addressing concrete effective legal measures, legal provisions and norms that would need to be concluded to attain and maintain a world without nuclear weapons. And the deliberations of its second session were quite crucial as they would determine whether a recommendation should be made to the UN General Assembly to begin a multilateral process for the negotiation of a legally binding instrument to ban nuclear weapons.

CARICOM vigorously argued that the clear imperative and urgency of undertaking the collective obligations in Article VI of the NPT in pursuing negotiations in good faith on effective measures for the attainment and maintenance of a world free of nuclear weapons should no longer be held hostage to circuitous debate and delay tactics that are but a thinly veiled guise for the indefinite possession of nuclear weapons. Accordingly, the region noted that the rules of procedure of the OEWG allowed delegations to avoid such expedient pitfalls to progress.

Having co-sponsored the resolution that established the OEWG and keen to participate in its deliberation’s Caribbean states, among other small delegations, were disappointed that all three sessions of the working group would take place in Geneva, where many small states, including CARICOM states do not have permanent representation, instead of in New York where all states are represented. In fact, even in instances where small island states like Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago had a mission in Geneva, it did not follow disarmament issues. However, in keeping with the open and inclusive nature of the OEWG—ensuring that all states, large and small, participated in the deliberations, the Chairman of the Working Group (Ambassador Thongphaki Thani of Thailand) made arrangements for a sponsorship programme to facilitate the participation of states that did not have a permanent mission in Geneva or whose Mission was in need of support.

Thanks to this programme, Jamaica was able to participate in the second session of the OEWG and was the only CARICOM country able to do so. Jamaica spoke on behalf of CARICOM, as well as for CELAC, and other small island states. This author was a “one-woman” delegation representing Jamaica and fellow CARICOM states in the OEWG. During the deliberations, it was noted that the Caribbean small island states and states from Latin America and the Caribbean were “punching above their weight” in constructing and shaping the discourse surrounding the rationale for a prohibition treaty and elements of such a treaty.
With the inclusive nature of the OEWG, Jamaica seized the opportunity to add the voice of the small island states of CARICOM to these crucial deliberations. The region was extensively prepared to make a substantive and vigorous case for the negotiation of a legally binding instrument for the prohibition of nuclear weapons as the next realistic step to attain and maintain a world free of nuclear weapons. Moreover, the Jamaican delegation asserted that these negotiations could begin immediately, even without the participation of the NWS, noting that “we must not wait to witness once again the catastrophic consequence of a detonation of a nuclear weapon before we decide to start negotiations on a treaty prohibiting these weapons.”

Utilizing the strategy of forceful advocacy, Jamaica delivered a strong statement during the exchange of views following the presentations of each of the substantive Panels and on the way forward. Importantly, Jamaica took the floor throughout the meeting to not only make the legal case for a prohibition but to also identify and elaborate the essential elements of a draft treaty, including its goal, scope, and obligations. On the question of scope, Jamaica advocated for prohibition on use; possession; acquisition; stockpiling; development and testing; transfer; stationing and deployment of nuclear weapons; and prohibition on assistance in the commission of prohibited acts and encouragement or inducement to engage in prohibited acts, including financing.

In its various interventions, Jamaica also argued that the goal of a global prohibition would close the legal gap and address the ambiguity in nuclear governance, as well as strengthening the rule of law in this area, including by building on the prohibitions in existing instruments such as the NPT, nuclear-weapon-free-zones, and the Comprehensive-Test-Ban-Treaty (CTBT). A key point in Jamaica’s arguments was that the global prohibition would also establish a universal norm against the possession and use of nuclear weapons, thereby stigmatizing such weapons and discouraging horizontal and vertical proliferation.

In response to the concerns and apprehensions about the proposed elements of a treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons expressed by the sponsors of the step-by-step/building block approach to nuclear disarmament, the Jamaican delegation argued that the steps or building blocks (e.g. the CTBT and the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty [FMCT]) are all perfectly sensible and would indeed be “effective measures” if they were taken. But they had not been taken – some for over 20 years – so there was simply no way they could be considered effective and agreeing to recommend them yet again would not change this.

Speaking on the way forward during the exchange of views on the final day of the OEWG’s second session, the Jamaican delegation emphasized that the Working Group had clearly identified and elaborated on the key elements for an internationally legally binding instrument prohibiting nuclear weapons which provided much clarity and the building of a common understanding of the elements for a prohibition. In this vein, the

\[\text{Statements of Jamaican delegation to the OEWG, Geneva, 11 May 2016.}\]

\[\text{Panel IV on essential elements that could form part of effective legal measures, legal provisions, and norms that will need to be concluded to attain and maintain world without nuclear weapons; Panel V on possible pathways to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations; Panel VI on other measures – reviewing the role of nuclear weapons in the security and other contexts of the 21st century.}\]

\[\text{Statements of Jamaican delegation to the OEWG, Geneva, 9, 11, 10 and 13 May 2016.}\]

\[\text{Statement of Jamaican delegation to the OEWG, Geneva 9 May 2016.}\]
delegation of Jamaica reiterated its request that the recommendation contained in the Malaysian Working Paper (WP.34) “to convene a Conference in 2017, open to all States, international organizations and civil society, to negotiate a legally-binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons”, be included in the Chair’s report to the General Assembly¹¹ CARICOM states were therefore pleased that the third and final session of the OEWG in August 2016, adopted the Chairman’s report recommending that a UN conference be convened in 2017 to negotiate a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons – a major milestone in the making of the TPNW.

The CELAC working papers (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) 2016a; Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) 2016b) as well as the working papers from Mexico (Mexico 2016), Malaysia (Argentina et al. 2016), the small island states from the Pacific and many other pertinent working papers from other NNWS and civil society were important sources of policy and technical input for the interventions by Jamaica/CARICOM.

The active and influential participation of small island states in the deliberations of the OEWG did not escape attention. One NGO twitter user following the process closely, tweeted: “#Jamaica sweeps through the #OEWG like a tropical hurricane. Ban is coming. Weasels had better seek shelter” (Wildfire 2016). Dr William Potter best captures the region’s participation in the OWG. In his words, “Unlike debates at previous NPT and the First Committee meetings, many of the traditional forceful advocates for disarmament were missing in action. In contrast, representatives from the Caribbean and Latin American states were exceptionally active and often articulate, with as many as six or seven diplomats from different Caribbean and Latin American states taking the floor consecutively and all forcefully arguing for a ban treaty (Potter 2017, 90). In his surprise at the region’s participation, he observed that “one could have been forgiven for thinking that either Jamaica or Mexico or even Austria was the chair of the NAM” (Potter 2017, 91).

Patricia O’Brien, Ireland’s Ambassador to the Conference on Disarmament, “welcome[ed] the broad and brave participation from states …” and highlighted that “… those less developed states and smaller states whose voices, including the many female voices, were so forceful and so necessary at the OEWG in Geneva” (O’Brien 2017, 8).

Conclusion

Today, the dynamics of the global security environment have radically changed and are increasingly tense, volatile, unpredictable, and complex. Against this background and particularly in the context of rising geopolitical tension which have also included threats to use nuclear weapons, making progress on nuclear disarmament is more difficult. Yet, this lends more urgency for progress on disarmament. From the vantage point of small island states of CARICOM, urgent action is needed on nuclear disarmament now more than ever.

¹¹See Statement of Jamaica delegation to the OEWG, Geneva, 13 May.
The TPNW provides a clear pathway and the most practical step towards ridding the world of the indiscriminate and deadly nuclear weapons. With its origin in humanitarian disarmament, the TPNW process levelled the playing field in disarmament politics by empowering a diverse group of actors, including the small island states of the Caribbean, to take action on nuclear disarmament. It has in effect democratized the nuclear disarmament discourse, and the Treaty’s adoption has proven that the non-nuclear weapons States have a say in nuclear disarmament issues. The voices of small states like the small island states of CARICOM matter. They have agency and exercise it in pursuit of their interest. And with the agency of non-nuclear weapon States another fundamental element of democracy has emerged, that is, inclusiveness. This suggests a better way for members of the international community to relate to each other in the difficult area of disarmament politics.

CARICOM’s active role in the TPNW process did not end with the adoption of the Treaty in July 2017. Notably, CARICOM states were among the first to sign and ratify the Treaty, with Guyana being the very first state to sign and ratify the Treaty on 20 September 2017. To date, the following 9 of the 14 CARICOM states have ratified the TPNW: Antigua and Barbuda, Belize, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago. CARICOM member states have pledged to help stigmatize nuclear weapons by raising public awareness of the devastating humanitarian impacts of their use, as articulated in their 2017 statement, “We can work to change international and public attitudes regarding policies and practices that form the basis of the acceptance of nuclear weapons (Webson 2017).

Against this background, in June 2019, ICAN, in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Guyana, convened in Georgetown the Caribbean Regional Forum to discuss the TPNW, to take stock of the Treaty from a regional perspective, to assess its prospects for advancing nuclear disarmament, global security and humanitarian norms, and to canvass progress toward its entry into force (International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) 2019b). The forum adopted the Georgetown Statement, which noted, among other things, that the Caribbean states “have to maintain the leadership role they played in the negotiation with action by adding their voice, their vote and their signature and/or ratification to the global effort to strengthen the norm against these inhumane weapons and to increase their stigmatization . . . as well as the need to deepen cooperation and collaboration among CARICOM member states on the issue” (International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) 2019b).

For CARICOM, the full and effective implementation of the TPNW is imperative and the first meeting of States Parties in June 2022 provides an important opportunity to set the right foundation. As such, the three important elements of the Treaty: the humanitarian approach to disarmament; disarmament and non-proliferation education; and gender and disarmament should guide its implementation.

By its active involvement in the TPNW process, CARICOM states have confirmed their historical interest and strong support for disarmament, their respect for the institutions which have been created to address the issues and their willingness to act

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12CARICOM comprises 15 member states. However, one member state, Monsterrat is an internally self-governing British Overseas Territory and therefore not recognized as an independent state by the UN.
in solidarity with those who wish to move with determination to create new approaches to do so. The small island states of the Caribbean are proud to play an active part in securing international peace, security and development and will continue to pursue a multilateral and humanitarian approach for people, planet and prosperity.

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Notes on Contributor

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