

Interview with Ambassador Elayne Whyte Gómez

Interviewer: Sarah Bidgood

Monterey, California

August 28, 2018

(edited for length and clarity)

Sarah Bidgood (SB): Ambassador Whyte, how was Costa Rica selected to chair the negotiations of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons?

Ambassador Elayne Whyte Gómez (EW): The consultations to identify a candidate to chair had started in Geneva by the end of 2016. Some countries approached us asking us if we would consider this possibility. There was a combination of factors: On the one hand, Costa Rica's credibility and the role our nation had historically played in promoting nuclear disarmament. On the other hand, the personal record. When you are part of an ecosystem like the one in Geneva, where dozens of organizations and processes interact, you share with your colleagues many different fora and negotiations. Colleagues get to know your work and your style—the way of approaching negotiations as well as the mindset.

On a personal level, I had taken part in the activities of the Open-Ended Working Group of 2016 mandated by the General Assembly (UNGA) to discuss how to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations, which functioned in Geneva. That experience gave me a grasp of the political and theoretical implications of the Ban Treaty, and of the processes that led to the recommendation this Working Group conveyed to the UNGA to convene a conference to negotiate a legal prohibition of nuclear weapons. Several member states of nuclear weapon free zone treaties (NWFZ)—among them Costa Rica—presented a working paper that served as the basis for the final recommendation of the Working Group to move to negotiations.

I think it was also a good starting point to have a country from the Latin American region to chair the negotiations. This is in part because of the historical contributions of Latin America and the Caribbean to peace and disarmament, but also because of the fact that the Latin American region gave strong political support to the humanitarian pledge launched by Austria in 2014, at the level of Heads of State and Government. That fact also allowed the Presidency to have a strong political commitment from my own region towards the process.

SB: How did you personally and your team prepare for the negotiations once you had been selected?

EW: First, at the national level, we had to undertake a very thorough reflection process that entailed consultations with many stakeholders to be able to understand the complexity of the process and the exact role we could play in the negotiations. We realized that we could contribute to facilitating the negotiations, among other reasons, because, of our knowledge about political negotiations in institutional frameworks and our culture and traditions give us great strength in terms of playing within the institutional decision-making processes. We thought there was a good combination of political commitment, historic engagement with disarmament, and

knowledge of how to work in highly formal institutional processes. Once a decision was reached at the national level, our candidature was submitted to the Group of Latin American and Caribbean Regional (GRULAC) for endorsement.

After that formal step, we started to reflect on how to organize the process itself, how to build a team with limited resources, and then how to manage knowledge—that which we had and that we did not have. The first reality to check was resource constraints: being a small country, we did not have the possibility of having a very large team. So we identified our functions and needs in terms of knowledge and skills. We, of course, needed strength in law and procedures, including international law, but also knowledge about the multilateral political process. We needed on the team experts who had been in the process leading up to the prohibition treaty in previous years, who knew the players, and who understood the politics and evolution of the global disarmament debate. This also meant having experience in both of the Geneva and the New York ecosystems and their different environments.

Also, because the negotiations were going to take place in New York, we needed knowledge and skills relating to the New York environment. This required solid negotiating skills and a knowledge of the players and the complexities of the political dynamics in New York. So we had Costa Rican diplomats with experience in New York and Geneva on the team.¹ We also had a person who had been part of the Costa Rican Mission when we were non-permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, which gave us yet another layer of knowledge about how to approach the political processes in New York. And then, of course, we have more strategic functions: knowledge and skills as far as analyzing the process from the point of view of international law, as well as of high politics. We benefited from the knowledge of then-Ambassador to Argentina and former Secretary General of OPANAL—Gioconda Ubeda (who sadly passed away in 2020)—and Ambassador Sergio Ugalde in the Netherlands, both jurists of high caliber.

Then we moved on to a process of consultations with all the stakeholders. We established channels of communication, but we also identified what kind of knowledge resources were there to which we could resort to, among others, from academic sources.

SB: Within your team itself?

EW: We identified from outside of the team knowledge on substantive matters, on the political dimension, and on the negotiation dimension. An important part of preparing for such a task from the perspective of the Chair is to really understand the genesis of the mandate [*ed.* set out in UNGA Resolution 71/258]. So I thoroughly studied the resolution and conducted consultations with those diplomats who had drafted the resolution so that I understood content and meaning. And I went back, of course, to the Open-Ended Working Group because that's where the whole mandate had been triggered. I reviewed many of the papers, including the one that we introduced together with Malaysia on the role of norms in disarmament to further emphasize why a prohibition norm needed to be achieved at this time in history.

¹ *Note from Ambassador Whyte:* The President's team enjoyed the collaboration of many Costa Rican officials. In this reference I acknowledge Costa Rican diplomats Norman Lizano and Marcela Zamora with whom we worked hand in hand throughout the process as part of the President's team.

SB: Did you have a central guiding philosophy for how you planned to approach the negotiations at the outset of the TPNW negotiations? Did it remain consistent throughout this process, or did it evolve over time?

EW: Yes. The philosophy was to be true and faithful to the mandate. I understood the mandate to have three main pillars: The first pillar was to negotiate a strong and comprehensive prohibition of nuclear weapons and to include provisions toward their total elimination—with the understanding that—according to the mandate—this treaty was going to be an important contribution towards comprehensive nuclear disarmament and that additional legal and practical measures were going to be required for the future destruction of nuclear arsenals and to maintain a world free of nuclear weapons.

The second pillar was complementarity: “Do so in such a way that the Prohibition Treaty complements the rest of the architecture.” Trying to understand that complementarity was a very interesting part of the exercise because it entailed acknowledging the role that each component of the architecture plays: What role the NPT plays, what its contribution is, what the vision of all states is towards the Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) as the cornerstone of the nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament regime, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), the treaties that establish regional nuclear free zones. In addition we had to acknowledge that there were other topics whose discussions had started but not concluded in legal negotiations, like the negotiations on a treaty of fissile material.

The third pillar was to negotiate in a manner that was both inclusive and with a sense of urgency.

In terms of the philosophy of the presidency: I sought to promote inclusive dialogue, aiming to level the playing field in terms of access to specialized knowledge so that all states could depart from the same level of understanding of the process and of the substance. Also, in every field of knowledge there are experts, but the process itself is in the hands of diplomats who are political operators and, therefore, we need to make sure we establish the channels of communication between the different layers of knowledge, and the different players —diplomats, activists, victims, experts, scientists.

Another fundamental component of the philosophy was the awareness that this conference was a legitimate mandate from the United Nations. From the very outset, I understood some powerful nations were opposed to the negotiations but such fact did not preclude me from establishing channels of communication with the players who had a different perception or that were very openly opposed to the treaty, to listen and to understand the essence of their vision.

Last, “Keep serenity in all moments and all times.”

SB: What contribution do you think that the TPNW makes at this particular moment in time [*ed.* August 2018], and how does this relate to the nuclear nonproliferation regime?

EW: The main contribution, of course, is to legally prohibit nuclear weapons, the only weapons of mass destruction that were not prohibited in international law. The TPNW also contributes

with a new framework to address the challenge of nuclear weapons in the international community. There is a new vision, moving the emphasis from the orthodoxy of nuclear deterrence or the security of the state to a new way of thinking, built on scientific evidence of the impact of any use of nuclear weapons. That is to say, it departs from the knowledge and understanding of the implications for human life and for the environment of the potential use of nuclear weapons. Understanding these implications, which come from scientific evidence, brings us to a new paradigm that states that nuclear weapons should never be used, and the best way to make sure they are not used again under any circumstance is to trigger the process of disarmament, which is already an agreed-upon objective. So the TPNW does bring a new perspective or paradigm shift, and it does bring a new momentum—along with a new, enhanced, ethical, political, normative, and legal imperative towards the disarmament process.

We have to understand that, in disarmament diplomacy, many players had been in the comfort zone for quite some time, attached to the status quo. Bringing a new perspective does have an impact on the dynamics of the debate. And we definitely need a new momentum and a revised perspective. First of all, nuclear weapons are a legacy of the 20th century that reflect the reality of the world of seven decades ago. The history of conflict between powers was the main contributor to instability. Now, the nature of conflict has changed in the international community. The potential for conflict between the main powers has been reduced over time, and the pattern of armed conflict has moved more toward the intra-state conflict.²

We need to determine how to deal with this legacy of the 20th century, which corresponds to that great challenge of inter-state violence among great powers. We are, at the same time, confronted with yet new challenges, with how we address the main challenges of the 21st century in the United Nations. While the international community still has the pending task of the elimination of nuclear weapons today we must address the challenges of emerging technologies applied to weapons systems, as is the case of artificial intelligence, taking us to potential scenarios of decisions about weapons of mass destruction or other convention weaponry being made without significant human control. At this juncture, while trying to solve this issue of the 20th century also we need to confront new kinds of concerns of the 21st century.

Now, last but not least, we also have to be conscious of the fact that we tend to analyze problems with our mindset too confined by the present time, and we lose the historical and long-term perspective. When we are promoting a paradigm shift, we should not seek an impact only in the short term. Let us look to the very example of the NPT: not all permanent members of the Security Council signed the NPT in the first decades, and only after the nineties did we arrive at a near universal membership. When you go back in history and analyze the way in which the international community has dealt with challenges over time, the first finding is that norms take time to have an impact on behavior. Cases like the norms against slavery, discrimination, and colonialization strengthened over time.

Another point to consider is that, many times, interestingly enough, norms are adopted at a moment in which they counteract the prevailing views and the power structure of the time. The above-mentioned practices, for example, were very much embedded in the power structure of the

² *Note from Ambassador Whyte:* Only four years after the original interview, great power competition has brought new unpredictability to the international system.

time just as nuclear weapons are in the power structure of our time. And, usually, there is a period of evolution between norm development and impact in historic terms, as was the case with the challenges cited above. How many specific norms against slavery or colonialism were developed and adopted before actual changes occurred? Could people have thought back then that the world was going to be different, let's say, three or four centuries later? Of course not. To those who think that the nuclear era is a state of affairs that will continue into perpetuity, I would have to say is that there is no such thing as "in perpetuity" in human history. At some point, there is going to be a combination of structural change and the influence of norms to generate evolution. So, the main contribution of the TPNW is to create a norm that triggers a new mindset and a new political momentum, as a mechanism and as a channel for the overall majority of the international community to express our view of the need for new thinking and action toward nuclear disarmament. And we have to understand that the impact most probably will go beyond one generation.

SB: What about to the NPT? How does [the TPNW] relate to the NPT?

EW: The NPT, as the cornerstone of the nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament regime, has rendered results. It has created an effective structure to deal with nonproliferation. Before the NPT was signed, we did not have the commitment and legal obligation from most countries of the world to stay away from developing nuclear weapons, nor did we have a system to monitor compliance with their non-nuclear status. So, we now have an international regime that already has achieved its intended objective: to avoid the proliferation of nuclear weapons. The NPT has its place, we need to strengthen it and its contribution to peace and disarmament, among others, by the balanced implementation of its three pillars. Also, we need to think about other pieces of the architecture—for instance, the CTBT and the International Monitoring System, the Nuclear Weapon Free Zone treaties and how they all mutually reinforce each other.

The TPNW starts by acknowledging their relevance and makes sure to reinforce the legal obligations already enshrined in existing treaties. The TPNW, among others, brings together in one international prohibition norm the more than one hundred countries of the world that are already member states of the NWFZ treaties. By bringing together a universal prohibition for nuclear weapons, it reinforces nonproliferation obligations, the nuclear prohibition and the norm that prohibits nuclear testing. What role does the TPNW play vis-à-vis the NPT? We need to start by acknowledging what each of the treaties is intended to achieve and to accept the interactive reinforcement dynamics between various elements of the regime. We have to understand that a world free of nuclear weapons is going to require many different mechanisms, norms, and legal obligations. That is something that has been formulated by the UN officials: this integral view of disarmament and nonproliferation as a network of legal obligations and formal regimes interacting together both at global and at regional levels. We need to move towards a more comprehensive view that reflects an understanding of how they interact with each other.

SB: This one is a similar question, but forward looking: What role do you think the TPNW will play in multilateral nuclear diplomacy, including in the NPT regime? If we want to limit it to a timeframe, then looking at the 2020 Review Cycle.

EW: I think we should clarify what role it should *not* play. The NPT is approaching its 50th anniversary. Every norm has its own history, evolution, and impact. When you have a norm or regime that is already 50 years old, first, you need to perform an assessment and understand its strengths, the challenges it is facing, and make decisions to strengthen it. So, the first course of action for the 2020 review process is to make every effort possible, on behalf of all the stakeholders, to contribute to the good health of the regime by strengthening the culture of compliance with all three of its pillars and by having a constructive view of how to address the challenges facing the regime.

Consider where you want this regime to be in the next 50 years. Looking forward is always a good exercise because it allows you to depart from the problem of focusing too much on the moment. By looking at the next 50 years, we will hopefully generate a constructive dynamic for strengthening the regime. As such, the Prohibition Treaty should not be a source of debate, in terms of a dichotomy of views. I think the consensus is that the international community has agreed that the world needs to be free of nuclear weapons—as it was before the second World War. Of course, there are different interpretations of how to get there and when we will get there, but the first aspect to overcome is the dichotomy between nonproliferation and prohibition because they are both part of the same equation. Other disarmament regimes have showed us that prohibition, nonproliferation, and elimination are part of the same process.

Of course, the reality is that the TPNW was negotiated, adopted, and open for signature. I do think that the fact that the negotiations were able to be completed in 2017 has helped usher in a new phase of the discussion. If we had dragged the negotiations into 2018, I think the dynamics would have been more complicated.

SB: In your view, how did the fact that the nuclear weapon States (NWS) did not participate in the negotiations for the TPNW impact the outcome? What specifically might have been different if they would have participated?

EW: The first impact was in the negotiation room. There was more convergence of views; it helped expedite the negotiations. The participating delegations were able to ascertain and deal with differences with much less resistance than would have been the case if the NWS were there. All converged in the overall objective of concluding the negotiations of a prohibition treaty. The NWS would have enriched the conversations in many ways, but I think the decision to disengage was a factor that allowed the negotiations to comply with the mandate from the UN General Assembly that the negotiations be completed as soon as possible.

The other impact was that, by opposing the negotiations in the manner in which they did, the NWS generated more media attention than there would have been otherwise.

SB: How do you think that impacts upon the TPNW and its role as a norm-building instrument? To have public attention from non-experts?

EW: I think that international politics and multilateralism today are more diverse than what they used to be. There are more capacities and more players in the room. You have a more

decentralized process for the norm to generate an impact by diffusion, by contagion. That gives other societal organizations an empowered platform to do their work. It made it easier for civil society to contribute, as did the fact that they received the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize for their role in achieving the Treaty.

The fact that this was not a consensus process and the opposition by nuclear states also attracted attention from the international community because the sole fact that negotiations of a prohibition treaty were being held was groundbreaking in many aspects. Whenever you are developing a negotiation of this sort, with an end game, communicating the results the last day of negotiations is strategic. The opposition by nuclear states helped raise media attention from around the world to the negotiation and the adoption of the Treaty.

SB: You have presided over other multilateral conferences and UN working groups before. How did leading the TPNW negotiations compare with your other experiences? Were there striking differences, or conversely, striking similarities?

EW: Yes, the striking difference for me was the sense of purpose. This sense of historic justice for people who suffered from nuclear explosions. There was this very strong human dimension, sense of purpose. Of course, you also have competing interests in the negotiation. In this case, national interests were there, but there was a positive spirit throughout the room; a sense that we needed to complete the task because we owed it to our fellow humans and societies. We owe it to future generations and to ourselves because we don't know if we will see another use of nuclear weapons, and we all have a responsibility to act.

The other difference is that, in terms of the negotiation itself, I had in the past co-chaired the negotiation of a multilateral treaty where there was already a text on the table when I came to the negotiation. I know that this is a common negotiation strategy, but starting with a text, delegations will kick off with entrenched positions regarding the text rather than discussing the concepts or common interests. In the TPNW negotiations, conversely, we were able to first discuss the aspirations about the content of the treaty, the concepts, and the text later was built on the basis of the convergence of views expressed in the room.

In terms of other fora, I was involved in the implementation of the entry into force of the Arms Trade Treaty. The first phase and the Conferences of State Parties had to focus on solving the operational basis of the regime. And believe me, it is very easy to become entangled in operational aspects that distract the discussion from the purpose that brought you there in the first place. When we move from the negotiation of the norm to the operationalization of the regime, there is a risk of losing traction to move on with the substantive objectives. Another aspect is that there is usually significant political attention when a treaty is being negotiated. But when the treaty enters the implementation phase, it usually is left to the experts, to the technical layers of national administrations, and there you have the challenge of keeping the political attention on the strategic objective that needs to be achieved. This is why I claim that the first five years of any treaty regime are to be handled with a long-term view to avoid getting stuck in discussions of operational nature.

SB: You brought in outside experts from civil society and academia who contributed in substantive conversations [to the TPNW negotiations]. What do you think this added to the discourse that would have been missing otherwise?

EW: It added to the overall knowledge resources available for the conference, not only to the narrative, but to the overall understanding of the topics being discussed. I think that is an expression of new working methods that are necessary in today's multilateralism. We cannot expect governments to have state-of-the-art knowledge of every single topic on earth, so there is a need in today's negotiations to have better interaction with experts in the field and policymakers. Each one of those experts contributes in a different manner. Experts may not be that familiar with the institutional and policymaking process, whereas the policymakers and negotiators may welcome in-depth knowledge of the particularities of a specific topic. So, we really need to have a mutually reinforcing dialogue. In this case, we had technical and scientific knowledge, experts from universities and think tanks, and we had the human perspective brought by activists and survivors. This resulted in a good combination of rational knowledge along with the ethical and emotional components of a good negotiation.

SB: What unforeseen challenges emerged during the negotiations, and how did you address these?

EW: The first unforeseen challenge was to have issues of international politics being drawn into the negotiation, especially the issue of the participation of observer states like Palestine and the Holy See on equal footing in an "all state formula." I anticipated that the operational aspect of the participation of civil society was going to be discussed as in other, different fora, but I did not anticipate that this issue was going to be center stage at the start of the negotiations.

SB: One of the trends or aspects that has been brought up recently is inclusion and diversity in participation at formal multilateral processes. Women, indigenous populations, civil society and other groups that are often marginalized or underrepresented in other disarmament and nonproliferation fora were highly visible at the TPNW negotiations, and they are prominent in the Treaty itself. So, what impact do you believe that this will have on the discourse surrounding nuclear weapons and, maybe conversely, what impact do you hope that it will have?

EW: It brought a narrative, but it also brought knowledge. It brought about a different result and a different vision. There has been a change of paradigm in the way we address nuclear weapons. Actually, the resolution that mandated the conference specifically mentions that negotiations are to be conducted in a participatory, transparent and inclusive manner. If you address this issue with ample and plural participation, the result is going to be completely different than if you did not. You will move from a uni-dimensional vision, that is the orthodox concern of the security of the state, to a more comprehensive view that seeks to integrate the challenges posed by nuclear weapons with the rest of the challenges that humanity faces.

Now we are bringing in new players, new perspectives, and of course you create a completely new approach and a new comprehensive paradigm—not a silo mentality but a systemic one. You will be left with a completely different paradigm when you have different perspectives, and one aspect of dealing with nuclear weapons is going to be seeing through a lens of many different

perspectives, not only the might or the destruction power of the weapons. You instead come to see the relationship in terms of environmental and humanitarian law, international and criminal war, and from the perspective of international economic development, because that's what's included in the TPNW. The amount of resources needed to maintain or upgrade nuclear resources drains resources that all societies need for development purposes, to satisfy human needs. Even industrialized nations that have abundant resources to devote to nuclear weapons need to invest in meeting their citizens' needs.

SB: People often talk about the fact that diversity in general, whether its diversity of viewpoints or identities, help generate better outcomes, because if you have homogeneous viewpoints, you are missing some aspects of the conversation. I would imagine that simply having a more diverse group of actors in a room, in a conversation, opens doors to thinking about aspects of nuclear weapons or whatever the topic of conversation is, that wouldn't necessarily be there when you have people from a similar set of perspectives.

EW: There is a maxim for the decision-making in policy or at the national level, or the highest ranks of government: The more views you hear, the more you reduce the likelihood of making wrong or risky decisions. I think that is the case for every aspect of policymaking—leaders today usually do not make decisions based on one or their own perspectives. That's why you have cabinets, because decisions need to take into consideration all the dimensions of one topic. We need different perspectives, not only to have a more realist view of the topic, because it's going to be a view that incorporates all the dimensions of one single issue, but also because you are going to reduce the likelihood of error.

Inclusion and diversity are public goods. It's the right thing to do to include a diversity of sectors in these issues of state and global security: it's going to affect their lives. You have to listen to different perspectives coming from different sectors.

SB: What was the most gratifying moment for you in the course of the negotiations?

EW: The interactive session between delegations and experts from academia and civil society was one of the best experiences. It fills me with enthusiasm. I had set that aspiration myself that we could promote exchange of knowledge back and forth and increase the level of understanding on the topics, focusing the discussion on such difficult substantive components of the negotiation. The first session went beyond expectations and the conference was off to a good start. That was a very special moment that gave everybody the perspective that we were on the right track and that we were able to complete the mandate despite the time limitations, we could not spare time in procedural discussions.

The second, obviously, was the moment of adoption. But before that, during the negotiations, I also acknowledge the moment when we reached an agreement on the preamble. That was good because the TPNW consolidates a paradigm shift in the way in which nuclear weapons are addressed, and that fact made the preamble a strategic part of the treaty text. Then, we had an agreement on Article 1—the core of the text—that covers all the prohibitions, after difficult negotiations. I was very satisfied. Then, we had an agreement on Articles 2-4 and continued on with the other parts of the treaty text. Towards the end of the conference I looked at the text, and

I realized we had a treaty text, a result of collective work. Of course, there were a couple of issues that still needed to be discussed, like the withdrawal clause, which remained a contentious issue until the end. Overall, the issues of safeguards and the pathways for potential accession of nuclear weapon states committed to undertake their disarmament obligations under the TPNW provisions had required more hours and discussions to elaborate a draft that complied with the desire to leave a door open for future disarmament processes. The negotiators addressed the issue of safeguards in a systemic manner. Why? Because the TPNW had to complement and reinforce the existing architecture. While it was not called on to solve all issues that either are unresolved or are contentious in other regimes, the negotiators were able to set the standard and link it to future improvements.

The countries represented at the negotiations, and most of the countries in the world, already have the legal obligation to sign safeguards agreements with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), not only because of their obligations under the Non-proliferation Treaty, but also because of their participation in NWFZ treaties. There is already a reinforcement of such obligations that is further strengthened with the TPNW. Most countries in the world already have the maximum safeguards standard, though it is not universal. The TPNW reinforces the legal stance of existing safeguards in the framework of the IAEA, incorporating them as treaty obligations without prejudice to further developments that the international community will make in the future (Article 3.1). For countries that don't have safeguards in place, they will need to comply with the minimum requirement, that is, they shall conclude and bring into force a comprehensive safeguards agreement (INFCIRC/153 (Corrected)) with the IAEA. Since most existing instruments are designed to verify the non-nuclear status of states, the architecture needs to further develop the kind of safeguards that are suitable to verify that former nuclear states remain non-nuclear. South Africa, which destroyed its program and later joined the NPT, is a good case-in-point in this regard.

SB: What if anything, has surprised you, about the response to the TPNW either among civil society, the general public, or national governance?

EW: A part of the reaction does not surprise me, which is the political narrative and the political comments about the treaty, the expectations, and prejudgments about what the treaty could or could not do from the perspective of those opposing it. But the treaty has not entered into force [*ed.* in August 2018]. Many of the arguments that were voiced after its adoption were reiterating the same positions stated before any the treaty's existence. Then, I would say the rest of the reaction was somewhat expected, because we are talking about a process that didn't reflect the position of the nuclear countries. So, it is obvious that there is going to be criticism because of what the treaty does or does not do, or because the moment is right or not right, or because there are different views on political or technical considerations. That is to be expected.

If the vision were a little bit more balanced, reactions to the treaty would take into account, for instance, the issue that I already mentioned: that most of the countries that have already signed are already non-nuclear countries, already up-to-date with their nonproliferation obligations, and they are up-to-date with their prohibition obligations included in other treaties such as the ones establishing nuclear-weapon free zones. As a result, one of the first achievements of the TPNW is to create a universal norm that brings together prohibition obligations most states have

acquired at regional levels. Therefore, the reaction of those that oppose the treaty does not consider all the positive elements that a treaty of this sort will bring to the international system. Even for those who have very strong opposing views, they need to acknowledge this and the many positive aspects and impacts of the treaty, especially in reiterating the legal commitment of non-nuclear states to achieving and maintaining a world free of nuclear weapons.

SB: What do you think is next for the Humanitarian Impact Initiative, now that the TPNW has been concluded? Do you think that this energy will continue to be applied to seeing the entry into force of the TPNW, or do you think that it will take on other issues? Where do you see it going?

EW: Let us separate the topics. The perspective of the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons is here to stay. I think it is an important breakthrough for the international community to have a completely new, fresh, humane and integral approach to nuclear weapons that profoundly challenges the orthodoxy. That interaction will continue in all fora in which nuclear weapons are being discussed because it is a result of a systemic –not a siloed—approach to the problem.

Then, we have the movement to achieve the legal prohibition of nuclear weapons, based on this new humanitarian paradigm. Now there are more opportunities in which this movement can make a difference, especially in the field of citizen awareness: this milestone creates the potential to educate the public on this new, modern, updated, integral, comprehensive approach. Among other things, this means talking about the interconnected nature of the legal obligations of states. You cannot have a legal obligation to respect human rights, for instance, and then make the decision to use nuclear weapons in a foreign country or your own. They are completely incompatible. You have a legal obligation to respect the environment or to fight climate change, and then go and test nuclear weapons that will have an impact on the environment? So legal obligations are interconnected. Nuclear weapons are not a separate, isolated piece of human knowledge. They are completely related to everything we do. It is why, at this point in time, we have to acknowledge that the issue of nuclear weapons does not stop with the status quo or nonproliferation. We need to move beyond and enter the field of disarmament.

SB: Can you see a way for NATO states to sign and ratify the TPNW from a legal standpoint?

EW: It is not NATO membership per se that is incompatible; NATO is a military alliance. It is the reliance on nuclear weapons, the threat or use of nuclear weapons, the stationing of nuclear weapons in some countries' territories, to control, to possess nuclear weapons, that will be incompatible with treaty obligations.

We have to distinguish between the political, the security or the legal perspective. Collective defense arrangements do not necessarily imply nuclear weapons use, transfer, stationing, among others. Prior to the adoption of the resolution that mandated the start of negotiations, there were specific efforts directed towards NATO members to oppose this treaty, emphasizing the nuclear nature of NATO, which is something not really established in its founding treaty.

SB: What are your general reflections on the process, of negotiating the treaty and of the outcome of the negotiation process? Is there anything you would add?

EW: My general observations on the process and what has to come later is that nuclear weapons constitute a legacy of a different historical phase. The majority of the international community now understands and demands that we move on to a new paradigm of security, one that is more closely related to the threats and risks facing them today. The majority of the international community rejects the notion that the existence of a threat to a state translates to an existential risk for humanity.

That is a reflection that I would like to reiterate: Nuclear deterrence is not only rejected because of the unacceptable impact of nuclear weapons, but because it does not correspond to the reality of today's world. It is the responsibility of the entire international community to look for and to build a new security paradigm and to solve 21st century issues and threats to security. This includes the ways in which security is going to be completely impacted by new technology. Weapons systems are going to be more precise and under the control of autonomous systems that may decide when to kill people. This is difficult to address from an ethical point of view. Today's security challenges are not necessarily about the use of physical force. They are about human talent and human-made risks, they are about intelligence and risks pertaining to this field more than those of a traditional military nature.

SB: Thank you, Ambassador Whyte, for taking the time to speak with me.