



[The International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons](#) is being observed around the world today, but so far, the UN has not achieved one of its oldest goals – global nuclear disarmament. 15,000 nuclear weapons remain in the world today and several countries have abstained from ratifying the latest Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons ([NPT](#)). A historic review does however show that the use of nuclear weapons has become increasingly unlikely, partly because of the norm-creating framework of the UN.

While the nuclear powers of the world refrain from ratifying treaties that ban nuclear weapons, they seem to be affected by the increasingly strong norm against the use of such weapons. An example of this is the way American policy-makers have acted since bombing Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. The US has been involved in several conflicts and tense situations since the end of Second World War, e.g. the Cuba Missile Crisis and the wars in Korea and Vietnam. But while nuclear option were reportedly considered, no nuclear bombs were ever used – by either side of the conflicts.

With the standoff of the Cold War, the UN continued to develop its legal norm-creating framework, as nuclear disarmament has remained one of the most important and urgent objective of the United Nations since its establishment shortly after the Second World War. The

memory of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were still fresh in mind, and nuclear disarmament the subject of the General Assembly's first [resolution](#) in 1946, and since then the UN has consistently contributed to the progressive stigmatization of nuclear weapons.

Nuclear weapons are prohibited through an extensive legal framework, which includes the NPT, the Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapon Tests In The Atmosphere, In Outer Space And Under Water, also known as the [Partial Test Ban Treaty \(PTBT\)](#) , and the [Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty \(CTBT\)](#) , which was signed in 1996 but has yet to enter into force.

Several other factors than the norm-creating work of the UN, such as public opinion and mutual deterrence, have been influential in making use of nuclear weapons less likely. The UN has facilitated the global fight for non-proliferation and continues to do so.

The UN Secretary-General recently [argued](#) for countries to show their support to the norm by ratifying the legally binding treaties on nuclear weapons, as he recognizes that binding treaties are more effective than norms: "For almost 20 years, a global norm has existed against nuclear testing based on voluntarily unilateral moratoriums. I applaud this restraint, but it is not enough."

An important step in the development of the legal framework of non-proliferation of nuclear arms was taken last week at the UN General Assembly, where the treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons opened for signing.

"Today we rightfully celebrate a milestone," Guterres said at the signing ceremony, "now we must continue along the hard road towards the elimination of nuclear arsenals."