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### Abstract

The entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) on 22 January 2021 presented a turn in nuclear politics. It is a unique instrument in the governance of nuclear weapons, because its advocacy was led and managed by non-nuclear weapon states and transnational civil society organisations. It is widely acknowledged that transnational civil society plays a democratising role in international governance and that the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) did exactly that for nuclear governance through its facilitation of the Humanitarian Initiative that unfolded into the negotiation of the TPNW. This article elaborates on this role, guided by Scholte's (2002) framework of the assessment of transnational civil society's democratising role in global governance, to map ICAN's role in six criteria: awareness, participation, contestation, transparency, accountability, and legitimacy. However, the extent of broad-based representation of civil societies across the world is equally important to ICAN's role. It is in this respect that the article turns specifically to African civil society participation as part of ICAN. Although several African civil society organisations partnered with ICAN, the question goes beyond the quantitative side of their participation, to its quality. Although challenges were experienced in the leadership and decision-making structures around racial and regional diversity, African campaigners see their role in ICAN as transformative and empowering.

### Introduction

The contribution by African states in crafting the nuclear order through participation in negotiations of international instruments and membership of organisations that govern the nuclear issue area

has received increasing scholarly attention (see, for example: Möser, 2020; Ogunnubi 2022; Onderco, 2016; Onderco and Wyk, 2019; Pretorius 2011, 2013; Swart, 2015; A. van Wyk, 2010, 2018, 2019; and J. van Wyk 2013, 2022). Drawing on Barnett et al. (2021: 4),

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we understand global nuclear governance to be “the institutional arrangements used to identify problems, facilitate decision-making, and promote rule-based behaviour on a global scale” when it comes to nuclear non-proliferation, disarmament, safety and security. Global nuclear governance includes governmental and non-governmental organisations, but little is known about the role of African civil society in global nuclear governance.<sup>1</sup>

Since the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 6 and 9 August 1945 respectively, civil society organisations (CSOs) have been active on nuclear issues, raising awareness around nuclear testing, the dangers of nuclear weapons, and campaigning for nuclear arms control and disarmament (see, for example, Acheson, 2021; Eschle, 2017; and Evangelista, 2002). In the past, states promoting arms control and nuclear disarmament have worked with non-governmental organisations, but mostly in the background, for example the informal diplomacy of the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs (Kraft, 2022), and Costa Rica, Malaysia and several CSOs’ collaboration on the Model Nuclear Weapons Convention (Nuclear Threat Initiative, n.d.). The Humanitarian Initiative that unfolded in the negotiation, conclusion and entering into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) showcased civil society’s involvement explicitly in a way that resembled the Ottawa and Oslo processes to ban antipersonnel landmines and cluster munitions, respectively (Borrie, 2010). The Ottawa process involved states collaborating with advocacy non-governmental organisations (or what we refer to as CSOs here), which set the normative mode of global institution building (Flowers, 2013). CSOs participated

in the Humanitarian Initiative and the TPNW negotiations through the International Campaign for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons (ICAN). ICAN is a coalition of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that creates awareness of the humanitarian impact and risks of nuclear weapons use, and lobbies governments individually and collectively to support the TPNW (Acheson, 2022: 2).

In this article, we explore the participation of African CSOs as partner organisations of ICAN. Any NGO that endorses ICAN’s partnership pledge, can apply to become a partner organisation. Partner organisations receive updates and briefings, are eligible to join the ICAN delegation to United Nations (UN) and other meetings, and may apply for small grants to promote activities that lead to the universalisation of the TPNW (ICAN, n.d.). We ask if African civil society participation confirms or detracts from the claim that supporters of the TPNW often make with respect to the democratising impact of ICAN on global nuclear governance. We do this by drawing on the theoretical framing of the role of transnational civil society in democratising global institutions proposed by Jan Aart Scholte (2002) to guide our analysis. In this way, we hope to contribute to the literature on the role of African civil society in nuclear governance through a case study of African civil society in ICAN.

### Methodology

The research can be framed as a retrospective case study intended to describe and interpret the actions of African CSOs to bring about nuclear weapons abolition as partner organisations of ICAN.

Our data collection methods included a combination of primary and secondary sources. These sources included interviews, reports, and documents on the Humanitarian Initiative, ICAN, and the TPNW. Seven in-depth interviews with individuals from transnational groups like the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW), ICAN, the World Council of Churches, SALAM Institute, and the International Action Network on Small Arms were conducted in 2023. Participants of the study were individuals from CSOs partnered to ICAN, who have played a critical role in creating awareness about the TPNW in Africa and abroad. These interviews shed light on the operations of African transnational CSOs in

this issue area, their aim towards achieving greater participation in nuclear abolition activities, how they situate themselves in ICAN, and importantly, their own evaluation of their role in the campaign. Interview questions aimed to operationalise the democratising effect of ICAN on global nuclear governance in relation to African civil society, especially their agency and representation in ICAN.

### **ICAN, the Humanitarian Initiative, and the Ban Treaty**

ICAN was founded after the 2005 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) Review Conference failed to reach a consensus outcome, largely due to the lack of any substantive progress on nuclear disarmament. The NPT entered into force in 1970 and distinguishes between nuclear weapon states (the five states that tested nuclear weapons by 1968) and non-nuclear weapon states (all other states). Non-nuclear weapon states agree not to acquire nuclear weapons, while nuclear weapon states commit in Article Six to cease the nuclear arms race and negotiate nuclear disarmament in good faith. To many anti-nuclear activists, 2005 was the turning point, especially for leaders from the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW), a federation of health practitioners campaigning for the elimination of nuclear weapons. The idea of ICAN came from IPPNW and sought to reinvigorate nuclear disarmament advocacy outside the NPT framework (Gibbons, 2018).

The campaign founders believed that the campaign “needed to be global, to engage young people, and to be rooted in the unacceptability of nuclear weapons – the catastrophic indiscriminate consequences that would inevitably follow any use” (Ruff and Hawkins, 2017). The aim of the campaign was to mobilise public opinion around the world to oblige state leaders to negotiate a legal instrument that would lead to the elimination of nuclear weapons. The campaign resolved to work with non-nuclear weapon states not in extended deterrence relationships with nuclear weapon states in the NPT forum, and the resultant transnational advocacy movement became known as the Humanitarian Initiative (Ritchie and Egeland, 2020).

In 2010, the NPT Review Conference’s final document stated: “The Conference expresses its

deep concern at the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons and reaffirms the need for all states at all times to comply with applicable international law, including international humanitarian law” (NPT, 2010: 19). Three conferences on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons followed, respectively in 2013 in Oslo, in February 2014 in Nayarit, and in December 2014 in Vienna. It helped ICAN establish itself as a greater coalition – its partner organisations, researchers, academics and hibakusha (atomic bomb survivors), attended the conferences and provided scientific evidence of the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons use. The Humanitarian Pledge was drafted in 2014 and signed by more than 125 states, calling for renewed commitment to disarmament obligations by NPT member states and measures “to fill the legal gap for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons and we pledge to cooperate with all stakeholders to achieve this goal” (Kmentt, 2022).

The mandate to negotiate such a legal instrument was sought from the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), which established an open-ended working group to “develop proposals to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations for the achievement and maintenance of a world without nuclear weapons” (UNGA, 2013). A second open-ended working group in 2016 recommended that a UN conference be convened to negotiate a legal instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons and would lead to their elimination. In 2017, after being negotiated in record time, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) was adopted and opened for signature, entering into force on 22 January 2021 (Kmentt, 2022). It prohibits possessing, use, threat of use, testing, and hosting nuclear weapons, in Article 1. It includes clauses on victim assistance and environmental remediation where nuclear weapons use or testing have led to suffering and damage.

Several analysts and proponents of the TPNW remark that the Humanitarian Initiative and the treaty itself had a democratising effect on the governance of this issue area (Thakur, 2022; Ritchie and Egeland, 2020). For example, Kmentt (2022: 20-21) outlines three aspects of the TPNW that bolster democracy: firstly, making use of the UNGA, the key democratic body of the UN; secondly, equalising the playing field by banning nuclear weapons for all

states, including the five nuclear weapon states that have used the NPT to legitimise their possession of nuclear weapons; and thirdly, the reframing of nuclear weapons as a humanitarian issue, which allows more stakeholders to partake in the nuclear weapons conversation than security experts using technical language that is inaccessible to most people. It is this last point that is especially relevant for the purposes of this article, namely investigating the role of African civil society in ICAN. In the next section, we operationalise the relationship between CSOs and democratic global governance with a special focus on ICAN and its aim to establish a ban treaty through the Humanitarian Initiative.

### Democratising Global Nuclear Governance

Jan Aart Scholte (2002: 293-295) identifies six ways in which transnational CSOs can contribute to democratic global governance. First, CSOs may increase participation on an issue by giving voice to a greater variety of stakeholders. Second, they can create awareness through public education activities, including drawing the attention of the mass media and making information on the issue available to the public and other stakeholders. Third, CSOs can encourage contestation by providing sites for robust debate where a variety of views can be aired, and consent is secured through discussing objections, rather than ignoring or circumventing them. Fourth, civic engagement on global governance issues can enhance transparency by asking critical questions and demystifying international regulatory frameworks seemingly far removed from local stakeholders. Fifth, CSOs can play a role in monitoring policies and operations of global governance authorities, thereby enhancing their accountability. Civil society can therefore push towards greater responsibility from global authorities for their policies and actions. Finally, through these factors, transnational CSOs can improve the legitimacy of global governance institutions and processes in an issue-area. ICAN arguably scores high on all these indicators.

Ray Acheson, a member of ICAN's steering group and director of disarmament for the Women's League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), an ICAN partner organisation, explains that some in ICAN wanted to mobilise "a broader, and more diverse constituency of activists" for nuclear abolition (2021: 133). A key lesson from the Ottawa process was to

ensure geographical balance and inclusiveness, which in turn encouraged ownership of the process by all participants, and the process being (and perceived as) "representative, transparent, and credible" (Acheson, 2021: 133). With more than 650 partner organisations in 110 countries, ICAN had an objective to build a diverse and broad coalition of partner organisations that have worked on the prohibition of biological and chemical weapons, cluster munitions and landmines. They recruited atomic bomb survivors and provided a platform to share their stories. (Ruff and Hawkins, 2017).<sup>2</sup>

The Campaign also draws many state and non-state actors from states not normally assertive in this issue area. The cross-regional core group of states that advocated for the negotiation of the Ban Treaty included states such as Thailand, Malaysia, Costa Rica, and Nigeria, for example (Acheson, 2018: 247). Actors from the Global South were able to share their experiences, e.g. of nuclear testing in Africa and the Marshall Islands.<sup>3</sup> Notably, participation in ICAN is not limited to formal civil society associations, but includes independent activists, academics, diplomats, scientists, doctors, and other interest groups (ICAN, 2020). ICAN also emphasises intergenerational participation in their campaign; many of the partner organisations include youth groups like Youth for TPNW, and its African chapter, Nyuklia Eureka, which are youth led groups for the abolition of nuclear weapons. In addition, ICAN drew in members from the LGBTQ+ community, and a spin-off of ICAN called itself IQAN (International Queers Against Nukes) (Acheson, 2022: 140). This intergenerational and intersectional approach served ICAN well, because it found support from other CSOs sharing its humanitarian, human rights, and environmental values, but not necessarily its focus on nuclear weapons.

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ICAN launched a website in 2007 to reach a global audience with an intent to engage those with a limited understanding about the humanitarian, environmental and security threats posed by nuclear weapons. ICAN's online content offers explanations on what nuclear weapons are, why they pose an existential threat, the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, global nuclear stockpiles, and the resistance of nuclear armed-states to work towards a ban treaty. The *hibakusha*<sup>4</sup> and victims of nuclear weapons testing became powerful advocates of the human impact of nuclear weapons, which have formed the foundation of the campaign (Hawkins, Sweeney and Ruff, 2019). Stimulating public knowledge about the international regulatory instruments and institutions that govern nuclear weapons aims to encourage an informed citizenry with an interest in changing norms and laws to serve broader humanitarian interests. Here, ICAN worked, as Scholte (2002) suggests, by exposing nuclear injustice and risks to public criticism.

ICAN was successful at contesting the discourses of nuclear weapons possession. They used discursive dynamics and "resistance rhetoric" to shape the information politics of nuclear weapons (Ritchie and Egeland, 2020). Their campaign was formulated and strengthened by using scientific research to spotlight the effects and consequences of a nuclear war. By fostering a humanitarian discursive framework, they presented "novel" research that showcases the consequences of the accidental use of nuclear weapons and its illegality in terms of International Humanitarian Law (Reynaldi, 2020: 890). By means of advocacy, ICAN shifted the discourse on nuclear weapons through stigmatising these weapons, as opposed to seeing them as tools of strategic stability (Reynaldi, 2020). In addition, ICAN's advocacy for the TPNW, emphasising victim assistance and environmental remediation, reflects how CSOs hold states accountable (Article 6 and 7) (ICAN, n.d.; UNODA, 2022).

The nuclear armed states and their allies resisted the TPNW process by arguing that a ban treaty will undermine the NPT and create divisions that will delay nuclear disarmament. They questioned the Ban's efficiency, because nuclear armed states did not participate in its negotiation and refused to join the Ban (Kmentt, 2022). Nevertheless, the TPNW received support from an overwhelming

majority of states in the UNGA and a vast and diverse coalition of CSOs. ICAN therefore succeeded in a key goal: to canvas for a treaty that counterbalances one-sided practices in global nuclear governance geared to serve the interest of nuclear armed states (Acheson, 2018).

The relationship of CSOs and democratic global governance does not always correlate positively, though. Scholte (2002: 298) outlines several challenges to the democratising role of transnational civil society. For example, he warns that, "civil society associations that deal with global governance issues can in some cases actively constrain discussion and suppress dissent. After all, civil society is not an intrinsically virtuous space" (Scholte 2002: 298). Indeed, ICAN's insistence to pursue a nuclear ban treaty without the participation of nuclear armed states and their allies was not received positively by all CSOs. As ICAN opened space for debate vis-à-vis supporters of nuclear deterrence, these CSOs felt that ICAN also closed space for internal dissent about different ways to achieve nuclear abolition. Acheson (2021: 148) ascribes blame to a lack of broad consultation and debate to get buy-in from these CSOs by the ICAN leadership and a procedural shift away from consensus-based decision-making in ICAN, but also describes efforts to mend bridges with these organisations later.

The challenge that is more relevant to this article is the extent of equal participation in ICAN. Scholte (2002: 296) notes, "if civil society is to make a full contribution to democratic rule of global spaces, then all interested parties must have access and preferably equal opportunities to participate. Otherwise, civil society can reproduce or even enlarge structural inequalities and arbitrary privileges... Hierarchies of social power can operate in civil society just as in other political spaces." According to Tallberg and Uhlin (2011), although transnational civil society gives a voice to the marginalised, they can sometimes fall short of providing an *equal* voice for all relevant stakeholders. Surveying transnational CSOs, Scholte (2002: 296) remarks that "Western styled, Western funded NGOs led by Westernized elites" can pervade sites of CSO participation (see also Scholte, 2011 and Bruhl, 2010).

In addition to its partner organisations, ICAN consists of an international steering group and staff complement. It is registered as Swiss non-for-profit organisation and receives funding from governments (e.g. Norway, Ireland and New Zealand), private donations (like the Gould Family Foundation) and organisations (like the Ploughshare Fund).<sup>5</sup> In a frank evaluation by an insider, Acheson (2021: 141-144) notes that despite efforts to diversify the steering group and include more voices in decision-making, the campaign continues to suffer from White dominance in its leadership. Despite a general feeling of support among campaigners from all regions, racial and regional disparities in ICAN prevail. These disparities are especially with respect to leadership and staffing positions, the way some campaigners from non-Western regions felt treated and their ideas received, and how resources have been distributed among partner organisations and campaigners. Compounding the participation challenge is a tendency of top-down decision-making in ICAN, what Acheson (2021: 144) partly attributes to “a constant underlying-and sometimes overt-tension between democracy and efficiency in the campaign’s operations”. These detractors to the democratic impact that ICAN has on global nuclear governance are not unique. In the next section, we explore African CSO participation in ICAN and how members of these organisations perceive their contribution to democratic global nuclear governance.

### **The Role of African CSOs in ICAN**

At the start of 2024, the number of partner organisations in ICAN from Africa stood at 95 (see Table 1 below). The geographic representation of these organisations across the continent varies, e.g., there are 13 partner organisations from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and 12 from Nigeria, but none from 21 other African states, including prominent states, such as Algeria and Namibia. Some partner organisations are branches and representatives of professionalised transnational groups like the IPPNW, WILPF, and the World Council of Churches, while others are smaller independent groups like Association Salam. See Table 1 on page 45.

To explore the role of African civil society in ICAN, we approached individuals from ICAN partner organisations in Africa who have played

a significant role campaigning for the TPNW. Our aim was to understand how they saw the nature and extent of their involvement in the campaign. We kept Scholte’s operationalisation of the democratic potential and challenges of CSOs for global governance in mind as a guide, but do not force findings into the six points that he raises. As is evident below, in practice, some of his points are sometimes so intertwined that we address them together.

### **Advocacy and Awareness**

ICAN is a single issue-based campaign (nuclear abolition) and its focus and strategies are well-defined. Different partner organisations may cover different issue-areas and are not expected to work permanently on ICAN issues, but they come on board, because they agree with ICAN’s strategy and objectives. African CSOs saw their participation in the context of African politics and priorities and what they can bring to the campaign. The continent’s diverse political systems, different priorities, and different contexts mean that each respective partner adopt approaches and create relationships that will work in their context.

This is probably one of the most important benefits of ICAN’s decision to include regional diversity and support CSO events in African states. One respondent from an African civil society partner organisation in ICAN was asked about its role in creating awareness in and out of the campaign. He noted that African CSOs played a crucial role in campaigning for the TPNW because many governments in Africa do not consider the TPNW a priority due to other pertinent issues on the continent, like poverty, food security and lack of electricity. Compounding issues on the continent have made it difficult for some African governments to prioritise nuclear abolition and the TPNW. This is not unique to Africa. Acheson (2021: 141) also notes that nuclear weapons were seen as a “minority issue” in the Global South more generally and campaigners from these regions wanted to see a greater diversity in ICAN’s material and speakers to reflect different power lines than North and South. African CSOs saw themselves as intermediaries that could translate information on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons and convey its importance to local politicians and communities in ways they would grasp.

**Table 1: African Partner Organisations in ICAN (ICAN, 2024)**

Countries	CSOs	Total
<b>Angola</b>	– Angola 2000	1
<b>Benin</b>	– Réseau d'Action Sur Les Armes Légères au Benin	1
<b>Burkina Faso</b>	– Réseau d'Action Sur les Armes Légères en Afrique de l'Ouest section du Burkina	1
<b>Burundi</b>	– The Centre for Training and Development of Ex-Combatants (CEDAC) – Alliance for the Observatory of Action on Armed Violence in Burundi – Colonie des Pionniers de Développement (CPD) – Terre des Jeunes du Burundi – Transnational – Women's Right to Education Programmes – Nduwamahoro le non violent Actif	6
<b>Cameroon</b>	– Cameroon Youths and Students Forum for Peace (CAMYOSFOP) – Association Internationale pour la paix et le Développement en Afrique – Cameroon for a World Beyond War	3
<b>Comoros</b>	– Association SALAM (Support, Help, Fight For, and Act for Migrants and States in Difficulty)	1
<b>DRC</b>	– Congolese Campaign to Ban Landmines – Congolese Physicians for Peace – CRISPAL(Cri de Secours contre la Prolifération des armes légères)-Afrique – Centre for Peace, Security, Development and Armed Violence Prevention (CPS-AVIP) – Femmes des Medias Pour la Justice au Congo – Standing Green "SG" – Foundation Alain Lubamba (FAL) – Women Concern (WOCO) – Comité d'Appui au Développement Rural Endogène (CADRE) – Union pour la Promotion/Protection, la Défense des Droits Humains et de l'Environnement – UPDDHE – Youth for Peace Grands Lacs – Africa Reconciled – Femme en Action pour Le Progrès Social "FAPROS"	13
<b>Ethiopia</b>	– Survivors Recovery and Rehabilitation Organization	1
<b>Gambia</b>	– Youth Centre for Peace and Development – Child and Environmental Development Association	2
<b>Ghana</b>	– Abibimman Foundation – Community and Family Aid Foundation – Foundation for Security and Development in Africa (FOSDA) – Global Media Foundation – Presbyterian Church of Ghana – Youth in Action Ghana	6
<b>Kenya</b>	– Africa Peace Forum – African Council of Religious Leaders – Religions for Peace (ACRL-Rfp) – Inter-Religious Council of Kenya – Kenya Association of Physicians and Medical Workers for Social Responsibility – Kenya Pastoralist Journalist Network	5
<b>Liberia</b>	– Liberians United to Expose Hidden Weapons – Assist Children Education, Inc	2
<b>Madagascar</b>	– Mediator and Observer Group of Madagascar	1

Countries	CSOs	Total
<b>Malawi</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation (CHRR)</li> <li>- People's Federation for National Peace and Development (PEFENAP)</li> </ul>	2
<b>Mali</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Association Timbuktu Center for Strategic Studies on Sahel</li> </ul>	1
<b>Mauritius</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Action Civique pour le Progrès et le Développement</li> <li>- Mauritius Trade Union Congress</li> </ul>	2
<b>Mozambique</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mozambican Force for Crime Investigation and Social Reintegration (FOMICRES)</li> <li>- Mozambican Force for Crime Investigation and Social Reintegration</li> </ul>	2
<b>Nigeria</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Achievers University Owo</li> <li>- Christian Council of Nigeria</li> <li>- Cultural Youth Initiative Movement of Nigeria</li> <li>- Global Network for Human Development Nigeria</li> <li>- Kairos Nigeria</li> <li>- Lastborn Humanity and Development Foundation</li> <li>- Poverty and Associated Maladies Alleviation Initiative (PAMAI)</li> <li>- Smiles Africa International</li> <li>- Society of Nigerian Doctors for the Welfare of Mankind</li> <li>- Social Welfare Network Initiative</li> <li>- Women's Right to Education Programme</li> <li>- ScienceSquad Africa</li> </ul>	12
<b>Rwanda</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Global Initiative for Environment and Reconciliation (GER)</li> <li>- Association des Jeunes de Saint Charles Lwanga (AJECL)</li> <li>- LA GALOPE Rwanda</li> <li>- PAX Pres</li> </ul>	4
<b>Senegal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Association Senegalese des Victimes de Mines (ASVM)</li> <li>- Senegalese Campaign to Ban Landmines</li> <li>- Reseau des Anciens Jecistes d'Afrique/Senegal (RAJA/S)</li> </ul>	3
<b>Seychelles</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Seychelles First Movement</li> </ul>	1
<b>Sierra Leone</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Advocacy Initiative for Development</li> <li>- Christian Outreach Justice Mission Sierra Leone</li> <li>- Campaign for Human Rights and Development International</li> <li>- Peace Drive</li> </ul>	4
<b>Somalia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Somalia Coalition to Ban Landmines (SOCBAL)</li> </ul>	1
<b>South Africa</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Africa's Development and Weapons of Mass Destruction Project</li> <li>- The Ceasefire Campaign</li> <li>- International Action Network on Small Arms</li> </ul>	3
<b>South Sudan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- South Sudan Action Network on Small Arms</li> </ul>	1
<b>Tanzania</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Human Rights Education and Peace International (HUREPI-Trust)</li> </ul>	1
<b>Togo</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Centre de Recherche et d'étude sur la sécurité et le developpment (Cresed)</li> <li>- Visions Solidaires</li> </ul>	2
<b>Tunisia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tunisian-Euro-Mediterranean Association of Youth</li> <li>- Youth without Borders</li> <li>- Model of the African Union</li> </ul>	3



Countries	CSOs	Total
<b>Uganda</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Holistic Operations for Rural Development</li> <li>- Ugandan Association of Medical Workers for Health and Environmental Concerns</li> <li>- Uganda Landmine Survivors Association (ULSA)</li> <li>- Facilitation for Integrated Community Rural Development (FICRD)</li> <li>- Rafusai Charity Organisation</li> </ul>	5
<b>Zambia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Southern African Centre for Constructive Resolution of Disputes</li> <li>- Zambia Health workers for Social Responsibility</li> </ul>	2
<b>Zimbabwe</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Zimbabwe United Nations Association</li> <li>- Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) Zimbabwe</li> <li>- Virtual Planet African</li> </ul>	3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>95</b>

A participant stated that African CSOs are often considered a third power in Africa because they have a voice. Without the involvement of civil society in their respective countries “it would have been difficult for ICAN to receive a single signatory or ratification”. He stated that African CSOs would face ministers, or MPs, to explain and negotiate at the table, to discuss the importance of ratifying the TPNW.

The moral drive of the campaign was expressed by an ICAN campaigner from Nigeria. As a member of the local affiliate of the IPPNW known as the *Society of Nigerian Doctors for the Welfare of Mankind*, he emphasised that, as medical doctors they have a responsibility to lobby the government to ratify the TPNW. This was achieved by organising seminars with key officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Federal Ministry of Justice in Nigeria. Additionally, key delegates from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) were invited to the seminar, where civil society had the opportunity to speak to them as a regional bloc about the strategic benefits of signing and ratifying the TPNW (ICAN, 2019). A respondent to the study is convinced that West African states have started committing to signing and ratifying the TPNW, because CSOs provided expertise and information, thus raising awareness about the devastating humanitarian and environmental consequences of nuclear war and nuclear testing (ICAN, 2019). After Nigeria ratified the treaty and deposited its instrument on 6 August 2020, the CSOs organised meetings with other West African states. More specifically, they met with delegates from Benin, Sierra Leone and Liberia. Among the

countries visited, Benin was the first to ratify the treaty on 11 March 2021.

An ICAN representative also emphasised the influence of faith-based groups like the African chapters of the WCC, which used ethical imperatives to mobilise their governments and draw attention to this issue (World Council of Churches, 2016). Faith-based organisations have taken an interest in nuclear weapons issues on the continent long before ICAN existed. For example, the All-Africa Conference of Churches (1977) spoke out against nuclear weapons generally, and South Africa's suspected nuclear weapons programme specifically in a 1977 publication, and the WCC worked with other African CSOs to promote the African Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (ANWFZ) Treaty (ISS, 2009). To bring nuclear abolition closer to home and raise its urgency for an African audience, these organisations emphasised the impact of nuclear weapons use anywhere in the world on human security and development in Africa, for example, how food security and refugee flows will be affected. This argument was compelling to many African government officials.

At a continental level (the African Union [AU] and its predecessor, the Organisation of African Unity [OAU]), African states had already taken a principled commitment to nuclear abolition, so signing the TPNW was described by some CSO members as a “small step to take”. Many African states, for example, South Africa, Algeria, Egypt, and Kenya took a strong position in the lead up to and during the negotiation of the TPNW, and civil society support was essential to justify the spending of these diplomatic resources.<sup>6</sup> One

respondent to the study mentioned that African civil society was driven by the principles governing nuclear disarmament in Africa, and the ANWFZ (or Pelindaba) Treaty that entered into force in 2009 itself was a major influence, facilitating their participation and contribution as members of a continental nuclear weapon free zone.

### **Participation**

Replacing a strategic and technical narrative of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation with a humanitarian focus gave agency to a new spectrum of actors in Africa. A representative from ICAN mentioned that, by reframing nuclear weapons as a humanitarian issue, civil society had the ability to contribute, which is something completely novel in this area. It opened the door for other constituencies like youth groups, faith groups, doctors, scientists and trade unions to play a role in advocating for the treaty, including city officials and parliamentarians.

One participant from an African partner organisation stated that once they joined ICAN, campaigners were encouraged to read the TPNW, and they used local advisors to help them understand the treaty holistically. He stated that as the director of his organisation, he took the lead in lobbying his government to ratify the TPNW. Together he worked with ICAN and proposed a seminar that later took place at the National Assembly of the Comoros. All deputy speakers of the three islands were present, along with members of parliament and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He stated that, “We presented members of parliament with scientific reason and scientific answers, not political answers because this issue has nothing to do with politics. This is the reality, and this is the science, we used Hiroshima as a reference.” By the end of the session, the deputy speakers vowed to push for the ratification of the TPNW. Their organisation published their findings, had a press conference with journalists, and could explain the importance of the TPNW on the radio and national television. The participants also used Facebook to educate citizens in the Comoros about the TPNW, and continues to work with regional blocs in Africa, as well as educate other CSOs of states in the region, like Madagascar, Rwanda, Burundi, Sudan, and Somalia. These regional blocs, states, their CSOs, and communities are not normally associated with nuclear weapons activism.

One respondent shared that out of 54 member states of the AU, there are 40 countries that are actively being lobbied or already participating in this issue. Even in countries where democracy is defined by a few elite, there are CSOs active in nuclear disarmament discussions, for example in Uganda (ICAN, Uganda profile, n.d.). The energy and commitment from civil society indicates the intent to influence the status quo of nuclear disarmament. With respect to African CSOs’ participation in ICAN’s decision-making, the respondent noted, “... as African civil society we can still influence what ICAN does through its existing structures. We need to better organise ourselves and have our own campaign meetings, but it should also include how we can get more member states to ratify the treaty, which is our priority. Civil society in Africa, those that are part of ICAN, have many networks across Africa. We have mobilised our own networks across the continent – and I can say that ICAN is Africa.” The participant continued to emphasise that a large percentage of partner organisations in ICAN are from the African continent; some have not joined formally but are working within their own capacity.

The participation of civil society in these different arenas reflects a form of empowerment, providing African campaigners with the practical experience of being involved in collective action to push governments to support the Ban Treaty. Their activities and initiative indicate transformative participation in the campaign, rather than simply nominally being in ICAN. Essentially, empowerment is an agenda that comes from below, because it involves action from below (see White’s discussion on transformative and empowering participation, 1996: 8-9). ICAN’s international steering group facilitated this kind of activism, but the campaign also acquired a life of its own in some African spaces.

### **Agency and Representation**

ICAN has influential networks like the WCC in the faith-based sphere and the IPPNW in the medical sphere. These organisations have many partners, chapters, and local affiliates in different countries and regions, also in Africa. These organisations enhanced the agency of some African states in the Humanitarian Initiative and the TPNW process by supporting governments at the conferences in Oslo, Mexico, and Vienna, and the UN meetings in New

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There is a new generation of African campaigners that have taken ownership of the campaign on the continent, like the African chapter of *Youth for TPNW* known as *Nyuklia Eureka*.

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York. African civil society also assisted governments in official forums by drafting talking points and encouraging them to advocate for the TPNW from a principled position and a point of activism. A respondent to the study stated that a delegate would stay in the room and help African officials and diplomats take the floor and make statements.

When questioning individuals from African partner organisations in ICAN about their sense of agency or representation in the campaign, one participant mentioned that he made a video to congratulate his president after his country ratified the TPNW. The video was shared by ICAN on the UN social media platform, and posted to the President of the Comoros who was the chair of the AU at that time.<sup>7</sup> This motivated the campaigner to work harder and “be a voice for Africa”. Additionally, he felt that campaigners were able to share their views and concerns equally in ICAN and felt adequate representation of their concerns and goals.

Another African representative in ICAN states, “Representation of civil society is there. Even if we are not physically in those meetings, there were platforms being used that made it possible to join conferences virtually in Vienna and Geneva; we could virtually participate in these conversations. ICAN have mobilised civil society engagement in the continent, but civil society in Africa has an upper hand in these conversations, but we struggle with technical language. But we see our representation in the campaign. We have African members in the governing structures of ICAN, the African Council of Religious Leaders (ACRL).<sup>8</sup> This forum is made [up] of religious organisations in Africa, and I am one of the leaders that represents civil society in the governing structures of ICAN.”

There is a new generation of African campaigners that have taken ownership of the campaign on the continent, like the African chapter of *Youth for TPNW*

known as *Nyuklia Eureka*. *Nyuklia* is a Swahili term, meaning ‘nuclear’ and Uzo Ohanyere, a founding member, explains the organisation was “born from a moment of realization and urgency” when he attended the First Meeting of States Parties to the TPNW and saw how under-represented Africa was at the event (Swedish Doctors Against Nuclear Weapons, 2023). Many African youth campaigners come from climate change activism and started looking at the nexus between nuclear weapons and climate change. Youth activism also intersects with campaigns against systemic racism in the context of Achille Mbembe’s (2019) notion of necropolitics, or who gets to decide how people live and die; who are disposable. Discourses that expose the long racist and imperialist histories of uranium mining, nuclear testing and nuclear use have gained traction in the broader debate of nuclear weapons and speak to a younger African audience that wants change (Hecht 2014; Pretorius 2020).

A participant to the study noted that in January 2023, the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) in South Africa, together with ICAN, arranged a regional seminar on the universalisation of the TPNW (DIRCO, 2023; IFOR, 2023). Many ICAN partners, academics, diplomats, and researchers across the continent attended. Many directors of organisations and those involved in multilateral affairs were now younger people in their thirties (these roles were traditionally taken by senior diplomats). This ties into the fact that the campaign has mobilised youth groups and a new generation of activists and young diplomats in this issue-area.

### **Challenges and Recommendations to African Civil Society**

As was mentioned above, a challenge for ICAN’s role in democratic global governance has been distributing resources equitably amongst partner

organisations. One African representative of ICAN stated that, lobbying from civil society in Africa was limited when compared to their European counterparts. The lack of resources were one of the challenges and continues to be. This is not only limited to movements in disarmament, but across other African transnational movements. However, the lack of resources did not stop CSOs from lobbying their governments at a capital level, often using personal resources.

There is only a handful of CSOs in Africa that focus solely on disarmament issues, let alone nuclear disarmament. The majority are organisations that work on peace, development, gender, and climate issues. Having a lack of organisations that focuses on nuclear disarmament can hinder organising activities in a sustained manner. African civil society partners to ICAN overcome this challenge by engaging with their networks in other countries to add their voice to this issue. For example, ICAN's Comorian partner meets regularly with other NGOs in different countries to motivate the need to join ICAN and lobby governments to ratify the TPNW. His organisation is not funded for these regional outreach and networking initiatives, but he integrates it into his work out of commitment to the campaign.

A recommendation from one respondent to strengthen the TPNW universalisation campaign in Africa is to create strategies for the five regional blocs – North, South, East, West and Central Africa. Although each state has its own procedural processes to facilitate the signing and ratification of the TPNW, and campaigning processes cannot be standardised throughout the continent, one participant stated that if African civil society mobilises together, it will apply pressure on their governments. The African regional seminar to universalise the TPNW jointly hosted by DIRCO, ICAN and the International Committee of the Red Cross and Crescent (ICRC) intended to do just that. This participant was also excited that African CSOs have the potential to lead the campaign against nuclear weapons in terms of statistics. African states have more signatories than any other continent, indicative of its continued anti-nuclear sentiment.

## Conclusion

Africa's involvement in ICAN, the Humanitarian Initiative and the TPNW is but another in a long

history of encounters in the nuclear issue-area. In this article we narrowed our focus to the role that African CSOs play in ICAN, particularly to their experience of their role in the TPNW campaign and what this means for democratising global nuclear governance. Guided mostly by Scholte's operationalisation of the potential of transnational civil society in democratic global governance, we describe African CSOs' efforts in terms of raising awareness and civic engagement in their local context about nuclear weapons and the TPNW. Participating in ICAN, the Humanitarian Initiative and the TPNW is generally perceived as transformative and empowering in the democratic sense – and participants felt that they shared in ICAN's achievements to contest nuclear deterrence narratives and to create new narratives that hold global governance authorities to account. Despite the acknowledged shortcomings related to racial and regional representation in ICAN's steering group and top-down decision-making hierarchies, African CSO participation has gone beyond the nominal. Although the sheer number of African CSOs listed as partner organisations on ICAN's website<sup>9</sup> is significant, it does not say much about the quality of their participation. However, the respondents we interviewed gave a sense that the campaign gained a life of its own in and across African states where CSOs are active, which provided them with agency and increased Africa's representation quantitatively and qualitatively in this issue-area.

The nuclear weapons issue does not receive the priority it did in the 1960s when Kwame Nkrumah organised the *Accra Assembly against the Bomb* and African states imposed sanctions on France for its nuclear tests in the Sahara desert under the banner of nuclear imperialism, or, when suspicions of South Africa's nuclear weapons programme under apartheid infused awareness about the connection between racism and nuclear weapons. However, ICAN's approach to draw in a broad coalition of CSOs reignited African civil society's interest in these debates and opened sites for their participation nationally, regionally and alongside their governments in international forums. African CSOs raised issues of funding and representation as challenges to their role in the campaign, but in general they could work with ICAN or use their initiative and own resources to overcome these challenges to an extent that they felt they contributed significantly to the campaign and continue to do so.

## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> The work of Jean Allman (2008) on the role of pacifist movements against 'nuclear imperialism' and particularly the nuclear weapons tests in the Sahara desert in the 1960s is a welcome exception.
- <sup>2</sup> See the comprehensive list of ICAN Partner Organisations at <https://www.icanw.org/partners>.
- <sup>3</sup> See [https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/nuclear-weapon-ban/statements/28March\\_MI.pdf](https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/nuclear-weapon-ban/statements/28March_MI.pdf) & <https://www.nucleartestimpacts.org>.
- <sup>4</sup> See Hibakusha testimonies at <https://www.icanw.org/hibakusha>.
- <sup>5</sup> See ICAN's annual reports at [https://www.icanw.org/ican\\_annual\\_reports](https://www.icanw.org/ican_annual_reports).
- <sup>6</sup> See Reaching Critical Will's reporting on the 2016 Open-ended Working Group on Nuclear Disarmament discussions, at <https://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/disarmament-fora/owwg>.
- <sup>7</sup> Congratulatory video to the President of the Comoros for ratifying the TPNW. <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=342332650543896>.
- <sup>8</sup> See more on the work of the African Council of Religious Leaders for Peace [https://www.icanw.org/african\\_council\\_of\\_religious\\_leaders\\_religions\\_for\\_peace](https://www.icanw.org/african_council_of_religious_leaders_religions_for_peace).
- <sup>9</sup> See <https://www.icanw.org/partners>.

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