ICAN statement to OEWG, 5 Aug 2016

Thank you Chair,

The catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons and the risks they pose to all our nations demand an urgent response. The evidence presented to the Open Ended Working Group has demonstrated this once again, and it has been an important process for states to discuss how the international community should respond to this, within a framework that has been open and inclusive.

I am speaking on behalf of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, which comprises 440 non-governmental organisations in almost 100 countries. We are convinced that getting a new international legal instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons is both necessary and achievable. We welcome the Open Ended Working Group’s inclusiveness and recognition of civil society’s important role.

We have been encouraged by the thoughtful discussions at the Open Ended Working Group this year. The support expressed here by a majority of states for the negotiation of a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons is clear in both the narrative of the Chair’s draft report, and in its recommendations. As the draft report notes, states have supported such a treaty as an appropriate and necessary response to the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons, and as the most viable option for progress on nuclear disarmament going forward.

A treaty banning nuclear weapons will strengthen international law and the global norm and stigma against these weapons of mass destruction. It will clarify that they are inhumane and unacceptable. The range of prohibitions included would also have clear practical impacts.
We welcome the accurate reflection of states’ support for a prohibition treaty in the Chair’s draft report, and would reject any attempt to downgrade or remove this clear majority position from the narrative or recommendations in any way. It is important for the credibility of the report that these references remain as accurate conclusions and recommendations, and given equal status with any other conclusions and recommendations supported by the majority of states.

We also welcome recognition in the draft report of states’ and others’ call that negotiations on a prohibition treaty should be open to and inclusive of all states, international organisations and civil society. We would expect participation in negotiations from all states that are committed to multilateral nuclear disarmament and the elimination of nuclear weapons. We emphasise that negotiations must not be subject to vetos wielded by any state, and so must not rely on consensus rules.

The text of the Chair’s draft report will be the subject of further discussions over the next weeks, and we look forward to participating in these. There are areas within the draft report that we consider should be strengthened to more accurately reflect the commitment to negotiations on a prohibition treaty that were expressed at the Open Ended Working Group. We will be raising these points in due course.

We are clear that the strong support for negotiations on a treaty banning nuclear weapons expressed by the majority of states in this forum provides the necessary impetus and foundation for negotiations to commence in 2017. We expect a mandate for such negotiations to be adopted this year – and that all states who are committed to preventing the devastating humanitarian risks and consequences of nuclear weapons will work together to prohibit and eliminate them, with the urgency that this demands.

Thank you Mr. Chair.