

"[A] threat or use of nuclear weapons would generally be contrary to the rules of international law applicable in armed conflict, and in particular the principles and rules of humanitarian law.

"[T]here exists an obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to complete nuclear disarmament under strict and effective international control."

—Advisory Opinion of the
International Court of Justice, 1996

Challenges for the Future

WORLD COURT PROJECT

The World Court Project began in Christchurch, New Zealand, in 1986. It was pioneered by retired magistrate Harold Evans who, through his Open Letters, asked governments to request an advisory opinion from the World Court on the legal status of nuclear weapons. International advocacy by other New Zealanders also helped mobilize supportive governments and build an unprecedented global citizens' campaign.

The project eventually attracted support from more than 700 organizations worldwide, including New Zealand and most of the 110 Non-Aligned States. More than four million individually signed declarations of conscience were presented to the Court.

In July 1996, the International Court of Justice, known as the World Court, delivered a historic advisory opinion on the legal status of nuclear weapons. It concluded that the threat or use of nuclear weapons would be generally illegal, and that there is an obligation to negotiate for their complete elimination.

Nuclear Weapon Free Zones

A Nuclear Weapon Free Zone (NWFZ) is generally defined, by international treaty, as an area in which the use, development or deployment of nuclear weapons is banned.

To date, there are nine internationally recognized zones that have been established or that are in the process of being established by multilateral treaties or by UN resolution: Latin America and the Caribbean, South Pacific, Southeast Asia, Africa, Central Asia, Antarctica, Seabed, Outer Space and Mongolia. Thousands of other municipalities and counties have also declared themselves NWFZs

The NWFZ designation is a statement of principle and is, in many cases, symbolic. However, some local NWFZs in nuclear weapon states prohibit the transit of nuclear materials and components, and others prohibit any investment in, or purchase from, corporations that manufacture nuclear weapons or their components.

"As long as any nuclear, chemical and biological arms remain in any country's arsenal, there is a high risk that they will one day be used by design or accident."

—Weapons of Mass
Destruction Commission, 2006

STATES THAT HAVE RELINQUISHED NUCLEAR WEAPONS

"The Ukrainian people, having suffered from the Chernobyl nuclear accident, are well acquainted with the potential disaster that nuclear weapons can bring. Ukraine calls on other nations to follow our path and to do everything to wipe nuclear weapons from the face of the Earth as soon as possible."

—Leonid D. Kuchma

Nuclear states can—and have—given up the development or possession of nuclear weapons. States that have done so include Canada, which was involved in the Manhattan Project to develop the first atomic bomb but later gave up the nuclear option.

Brazil and Argentina abandoned their nuclear weapon development programs. South Africa dismantled its nuclear weapons and joined the ranks of the non-nuclear-weapon states.

Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine inherited a massive stockpile of nuclear weapons when the Soviet Union broke up. They gave up their weapons in exchange for security guarantees and economic assistance from the United States, Russia and elsewhere.

