

By Rick Gladstone

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For the first time in the seven-decade effort to avert a nuclear war, a global treaty has been negotiated that proponents say would, if successful, lead to the destruction of all [nuclear weapons](#) and forever prohibit their use.

Negotiators representing two-thirds of the 192-member [United Nations](#) finalized [the 10-page treaty](#) this week after months of talks.

The document, called the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, was formally adopted on Friday at United Nations headquarters in New York during the final session of the negotiation conference.

It will be open for signature by any member state starting on Sept. 20 during the annual General Assembly and would enter into legal force 90 days after being ratified by 50 countries.

“The world has been waiting for this legal norm for 70 years,” said Elayne G. Whyte Gómez, Costa Rica’s ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva and chairwoman of the conference, which was broadcast live on the [United Nations website](#).

Cheers and applause erupted among the delegates after the vote was tallied: 122 in favor and one against — the Netherlands, the only NATO member that participated in the conference. Singapore abstained.

The participants did not include any of the world's nine nuclear-armed countries, which conspicuously boycotted the negotiations.

Some critics of the treaty, including the United States and its close Western allies, publicly rejected the entire effort, calling it misguided and reckless, particularly when [North Korea](#) is threatening a nuclear-tipped missile strike on American soil.

“We have to be realistic,” Nikki R. Haley, the American ambassador to the United Nations, said when the talks began in March. “Is there anyone who thinks that North Korea would ban nuclear weapons?”

In a [joint statement](#) released after the treaty was adopted, the United States, Britain and France said, “We do not intend to sign, ratify or ever become party to it.”

The statement said that “a purported ban on nuclear weapons that does not address the security concerns that continue to make nuclear deterrence necessary cannot result in the elimination of a single nuclear weapon and will not enhance any country's security, nor international peace and security.”

Disarmament groups and other proponents of the treaty said they had never expected that any nuclear-armed country would sign it — at least not at first. Rather, supporters hope, the treaty's widespread acceptance elsewhere will eventually increase the public pressure and stigma of harboring and threatening to use such weapons of unspeakable destruction, and make holdouts reconsider their positions.

“This treaty is a strong categorical prohibition of nuclear weapons and is really rooted in humanitarian law,” said Beatrice Fihn, executive director of the [International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons](#), a Geneva-based coalition of groups that advocated the treaty.



~~United Kingdom and United States are the only two countries that have not signed the treaty. The treaty is a landmark achievement in the history of disarmament, but it is not a magic wand. It will take time and effort to ensure that the treaty is fully implemented and that all countries are held accountable for their actions. The United Kingdom and the United States have a responsibility to lead by example and to ensure that the treaty is fully implemented. They must also ensure that the treaty is not undermined by any actions that would undermine the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons.~~