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THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND THE TREATY ON THE PROHIBITION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

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As a leader on sustainable development, Sweden should sign and ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. As a state party to the Treaty, Sweden would contribute to eliminating nuclear weapons and strengthen its role as a development leader. The goals of Sweden's foreign policy cannot be met without efforts to address the two existential threats facing humanity - climate change and nuclear weapons.

Climate change is happening slowly and could be mitigated, but the damage from nuclear weapons will be immediate and irreversible. A single nuclear weapon detonated in a major city would kill millions and continue to cause harm to people and the environment for decades. The humanitarian community knows that no relief efforts will be possible in the face of a nuclear detonation, no state, agency or international organization has the capacity to respond to the devastation caused by a nuclear weapon.[1] A limited nuclear exchange is predicted to result in a global famine that would kill two billion people due to the soot deposited in the atmosphere. That soot would alter temperatures and decrease food production around the world. Costs would skyrocket and the most vulnerable people who are already malnourished or food insecure would no longer be able to afford food. As food prices increase and famine sets in, people will be forced to migrate to survive thus increasing pressure on the few areas still able to produce food.[2]

While Sweden is taking significant steps to address climate change, efforts to address the threat posed by nuclear weapons have been less ambitious. This lack of action is particularly problematic because nuclear weapons also hamper other global efforts like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity, the SDGs set an ambitious and inclusive agenda for development. All states have committed to working towards these targets by 2030 and Sweden strives to be a leader in sustainable development. However, the use, development or possession of nuclear weapons or the reliance on nuclear deterrence is completely incompatible with a commitment to the SDGs.

Nuclear Weapons: Sustainable Threats

Even if nuclear weapons are never used again, their continued existence hinders the achievement of the SDGs. Currently, billions of dollars are being poured

in the production, development and modernization of nuclear weapons. For example, it is estimated that the United States alone will spend approximately USD 348 billion on its nuclear arsenal over the next decade. That is about USD 35 billion a year or USD 95 million a day.[3] And this is just one out of 9 nuclear weapons possessors, which all are modernizing and investing in their nuclear weapons. Investment in nuclear weapons is not limited to the governments of nuclear armed states. Financial institutions in 24 different countries made more than USD 525 billion available to publicly held nuclear weapon producing companies between 2014 and 2017.[4]

In contrast to the vast sums of money being sunk into nuclear weapons, the amount of money spent on achieving the SDGs is quite modest. Net official development assistance by members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee was merely USD 146.6 billion in 2017 with Sweden's official development assistance standing at USD 5.5 billion.[5] The OECD Development Assistance Committee includes 29 states compared to the nine nuclear armed states.

The world needs more investment in sustainable development if we are going to reach the Sustainable Development Goals. The World Health Organization reports that "achieving the SDG health targets would require new investments increasing over time from an initial US$ 134 billion annually to $371 billion by 2030."[6] All SDGs will require additional investments but some of those funds are currently being squandered on nuclear weapons. Even if they are not used again, nuclear weapons have a negative impact on global progress towards the SDGs by diverting much needed funding.

A Tool for Sustainable Development

These threats to global progress have not gone unnoticed. The impact of nuclear weapons on sustainable development and humanity was one of the motivators of the Humanitarian Initiative on Nuclear Weapons meetings which eventually lead to the negotiation of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) in 2017. The TPNW's preamble recognizes that the catastrophic consequences of nuclear weapons "pose grave implications for [...] the environment, socioeconomic development, the global economy, food security and the health of current and future generations." To truly achieve the goals on the 2030 Agenda, Sweden should sign and ratify the TPNW as soon as possible.

The Treaty is grounded in humanitarian concerns about nuclear weapons and therefore is strongly related to the SDGs. Its focus on human security with strong provisions on gender equality and indigenous rights ensures that the Treaty is in line with a feminist foreign policy and Sweden's position as leader on sustainable development.

The 2030 Agenda is a long term project so it possible that the specific SDGs prioritized by Sweden will change with governments and policies but what will remain constant is the contributions the TPNW can make to the achievement of these goals. As a leading force for sustainable development, Sweden will see its work strengthened by the universalization and ratification of the TPNW.

The General Obligations in Article 1 of the Treaty outline the core prohibitions of the treaty including prohibitions on production, transfer, stockpiling, testing and use. Since these prohibitions are aimed at preventing future nuclear weapons explosions and related casualties, humanitarian harm and environmental harm, a number of SDGs have direct connections. In particular, **SDG 3** "*Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages*," **SDG 6** "*Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all,*" **SDG 14** "*Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development*" and **SDG 15** "*Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss*" are especially relevant to the

prohibition of the use or testing of nuclear weapons. In addition, new international humanitarian law furthers SDG 16.

The prohibition on developing, producing, and manufacturing nuclear weapons in Article 1(a) will begin to limit the resources (financial and scientific) devoted to nuclear arsenals while the prohibition on assistance with those actions will limit private sector investment in nuclear weapons producers. As discussed above, a reduction in spending on nuclear weapons could allow more funding and research to be devoted to the Sustainable Development Goals. It is possible that prohibiting the development, production and manufacturing of nuclear weapons will contribute to progress on a number of SDGs including **SDG 1** "*End poverty in all its forms everywhere*", **SDG 2** "*End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture*" and **SDG 10** "*Reduce inequality within and among countries*" in particular. Furthermore, shifting funds from the production and maintenance of nuclear weapons could easily contribute to **SDG 17** "*Partnership for the Goals*" which includes a specific target on mobilizing "additional financial resources for developing countries from multiple sources."

The positive obligations outlined in Articles 6 and 7 of the Treaty when implemented will have the most direct impact on the realization of the SDGs. When implemented, Article 6(1) on assistance to individuals affected by nuclear weapons use or testing will have a direct impact on SDG 16 regarding Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions by filling the legal gap in regard to nuclear weapons and by promoting the rights of those affected. Obligations concerning assistance to individuals affected by nuclear weapons use and testing will further contribute to the achievement of SDG 3 on Good Health and Well-Being, especially due to the principle of non-discrimination in the text. Assistance that is implemented in an age- and gender-sensitive manner can contribute to SDG 5 on gender equality by addressing the current health impacts of nuclear weapons detonations which disproportionately affect women and girls.[7]

Article 6(2) on environmental remediation will contribute to the realization of a number of Sustainable Development Goals. The implementation of environmental remediation provisions in the prohibition treaty will have the greatest impact on SDGs 14 on Life below Water and 15 on Life on Land as attempts to clean up contamination on land and in the oceans may restore damaged ecosystems or at minimum mitigate the ongoing damage to these ecosystems. There is significant evidence that contamination from the use and testing of nuclear weapons has had an impact on land and marine flora and fauna in addition to rendering wide stretches of land inaccessible. If land can be made safe for sustainable use, environmental remediation may contribute to realizing the targets of SDG 2 on hunger, food security and sustainable agriculture. Environmental remediation will also have an impact on SDG 3 on Good Health and Well-Being as well as SDG 6 regarding Clean Water and Sanitation. Finally, Article 7's provisions on international cooperation echo **SDG 17** (*Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development*).

Conclusion

The continued existence of nuclear weapons threatens global progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals.

Nuclear weapons must be eliminated in order to truly make progress towards the SDGs. Recent history has shown that the best way to eliminate a weapon is to prohibit if first. If Sweden is truly committed to the SDGs and a Feminist Foreign Policy then it should take meaningful steps towards the elimination of nuclear weapons starting with signing and ratifying the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

FOOTNOTES:

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