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Interview with Melissa Parke

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Summary:

The interview covers Melissa Parke's background and involvement with the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), the challenges ICAN faces in getting countries to disarm and join the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), ICAN's strategies and advocacy approaches, and Parke's views on the importance of eliminating nuclear weapons to protect the planet and humanity. This transcript was lightly edited to ease understanding. At a number of occasions, the debate was interrupted by noise from outside, these are marked by [...] sign. During the editing process, Melissa Parke added a few notes. These are marked with 'Note:' This document summary was generated by an artificial intelligence language model and was reviewed by a Wilson Center staff member.

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Michal Onderco: So thank you very much for finding the time to talk to me. I always start these interviews with the very general question, which is how did you become interested in nuclear weapons?

Melissa Parke: Okay. Well, it's been, an interest for a long time. I first got involved in a general way in the late 90s, when there was a campaign in Western Australia against the establishment of a global nuclear waste dump in Western Australia on Aboriginal land. I joined that campaign. And I've been interested in the issue over the years, as I worked with the United Nations. And then I was a Member of Parliament, and was involved on a number of issues in parliament, human rights, environment, good governance. And disarmament was another one. I was part of the Joint Treaties Committee, that looked at nuclear weapons issues. I was also interested, very interested in ICAN's work and would meet with them when they came to the Parliament. ICAN Australia I'm talking about. And then I became a Tom Uren Memorial Fund patron while I was still in Parliament, along with Anthony Albanese, the current prime minister. When I left parliament, retired in 2016, ICAN Australia asked me to be one of their ambassadors. So I did that from 2017 to basically when I came here. So it's not been a full time kind of cause, but it's been there for a long time, the general interest in the subject.

Michal Onderco: You mentioned you were in Parliament, you worked at the UN before. What made you interested in civil society and especially the type of civil society like ICAN, which is, sort of tries to be an advocacy organization? many people, when they retire from Parliament, they go to universities, they go to think-tanks. You went to advocacy.

Melissa Parke: I've been involved with civil society from my early career, professional career, even when I was a lawyer in Australia, before I went to the UN, I was working for a community legal center. I was getting involved in environmental issues, and I was involved with civil society organizations back then. I was on the National Council of the Australian Conservation Foundation, as a West Australian representative. I was the spokesperson for the Communities for Coastal Conservation. I was part of the West Australian branch of the International Commission of Jurists. And the President of Labor Lawyers, it was like very much involved in that side and a co-founder of the Environmental Defender's Office in West Australia. So basically already very involved with civil society even before I went to the United Nations. Obviously when I was in the United Nations doing work in the field, in particular, I was working closely with other civil society organizations like, Save the Children, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. After I left, when I was in parliament, obviously, I was connecting very much. A lot of civil society organizations came to see me because they knew I was very sympathetic. And then when I left Parliament, I was working on Yemen with the UN Human Rights Council, and we worked closely with civil society organizations, so it's always been a part of who I am. So it's very natural for me, and since I worked full time in the UN, I've seen changes over the years, in how my former colleagues at the UN feel about being in the United Nations organization. And, you know, frankly, NGOs can have more impact. Working in an NGO these days, you can have more impact than working at the United Nations.

Michal Onderco: We'll come to that in, in a bit. So you started to be in 2016, as you mentioned, once you left the Parliament, you started to be more active on nuclear weapons. Again, you were active before, and then you started again. If you look at the nuclear weapons in the world

today, what kind of impact do they have, in your view? And do you see them as stabilizing or as a destabilizing factor?

Melissa Parke: Well, of course, it is claimed by nuclear armed states and their allies that nuclear weapons are a stabilizing factor. But I think that basically correlates the lack of World War III with the presence of nuclear weapons. And correlation is not causation. And there are many reasons why countries don't go to war. It's not just because, you know, they might have nuclear weapons. [...] And I'm just putting aside the issue of the number of nuclear near-misses and accidents that have happened over the decades that we know about involving nuclear weapons, which means that, but for luck, we wouldn't be here anymore. It's not because of deterrence. It's because of luck. There would be some examples where you could say deterrence obviously has played an impact. It has worked to keep some measure of caution in, you know, the US and Russia at various times. But can you say that that still applies in this age? The Cold War is finished. It's no longer just Russia and the US. We've got a multiplicity of nuclear armed states, different levels of sophistication in terms of handling and storage and a lot that we don't know about how things are being handled. So even though the world was very dangerous during the Cold War, I think it's much more dangerous now. And to assume that nuclear weapons are keeping us safe when at any moment there could be a cyber attack or an unhinged leader or an accident or miscalculation from any one of these nuclear armed states. I mean, that's really an indication that we're just one accident away from oblivion. And the other thing is, I think we've seen with Russia and the war in Ukraine, that rather than providing peace and stability, nuclear weapons have been used to coerce and to intimidate and to threaten, so they are used as an instrument, a very negative instrument of power. And so, no, I don't believe they are a force for good or for stability. And furthermore, if the world thought that, why have more than 180 countries signed up to the Non-Proliferation Treaty and agreed to never acquire them? Why is it that we try so hard to prevent proliferation if we believe that nuclear weapons are essentially a thing for good? Clearly they're not.

Michal Onderco: And in in the debate on nuclear weapons today, what do you think is should be the focus of civil society. So not what is, but what should be the focus of civil society? Should it be focused, like your organization, on elimination of nuclear weapons? Or should the civil society more broadly focused on things like, practical steps or creating broader normative pressure against nuclear weapons or nuclear disarmament, nuclear deterrence discourse? What should the civil society do in this regard?

Melissa Parke: Well, I think there's a divergence of approaches where you have those calling for elimination and those calling for arms control or risk reduction. And basically we've seen an almost complete breakdown in arms control agreements. So, you might say we support them, but they're not going anywhere at the moment. I believe risk reduction is really important. It's crucial, in the short term we need to get weapons off of high alert launch status. We need to have a lot more transparency around what's happening with nuclear weapons in all of the nuclear armed states, so that each nuclear armed state is aware of what the others are doing. I think that's really important. And it has happened in the past, albeit in a much more simplified Cold War era. So I think risk reduction is super important in the short term, but it can't be the complete goal because we know that the nuclear weapons of today are far more powerful than

the atomic bombs dropped in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Even one nuclear weapon dropped on a major city would kill millions of people, not to mention the long term impacts. [...]

Melissa Parke: And even with the short term goal (of risk reduction), there's no measures that nuclear armed states are willing to take that actually genuinely reduce the risk. Or there are very few measures. They won't do anything that they say will reduce the credibility of their deterrent, which means they won't take their 2000 nuclear weapons off of high alert launch status. So that's the whole problem with risk reduction, that there's nobody actually doing it. They're doing the opposite. They're actually increasing their arsenals, modernizing their arsenals. They're adding artificial intelligence into the mix, which is only going to make things more dangerous. So I think we still need to focus on elimination. We still need to raise the awareness of the general public. We still need to argue against deterrence. In fact, we have to do all of those things. But we're not going to spend all of our energy focusing on risk reduction, because there are many, many other organizations doing that. And so we don't need to do that. Our aim is elimination. And there aren't any nuclear armed states that don't support the ultimate vision of a nuclear weapons free world. Somehow we have to get to that goal.

Michal Onderco: One of the questions that I ask every respondent is, what do they see as the biggest failure in the field since the end of the Cold War? What has been the biggest failure in the nuclear field since the collapse of the Soviet Union?

Melissa Parke: I'd say it's the failure of the nuclear arms states to disarm in accordance with their legal obligations under Article VI of the NPT. That is the biggest failure. They have focused very much on non-proliferation and I think largely been successful in that, but failed utterly when it comes to their obligations around disarmament.

Melissa Parke: And that's the whole reason why civil society and various member states decided to begin the process on the TPNW.

Michal Onderco: And do you do you think there is someone to blame for this, for this failure to pursue ...?

Melissa Parke: The nuclear weapon states are to blame.

Michal Onderco: Absolutely. So in general their policy elites? Or is there someone within the nuclear weapon states that you think is to blame for this?

Melissa Parke: Well, we don't focus on who's right and wrong, in terms of states. We focus on the nuclear weapons. The enemy is the nuclear weapons themselves. As former Secretary General (Ban Ki-moon) said, 'there are no right hands for wrong weapons'. So all the nuclear armed states must disarm, whether they want to do that unilaterally or in agreement with the others, in accordance with a verification process. But we don't distinguish between the nuclear armed states, in that sense. Of course, we do condemn any actions that we see as escalatory or provocative. We condemned Russia when nuclear threats were made over Ukraine, as we've condemned posturing by North Korea, but also the US and South Korea; by Israel, when certain politicians have talked about the idea of using nuclear weapons on Gaza. We call it out wherever we see it.

Michal Onderco: And so you talked about the failure to disarm. Do you think in that period

since the end of the Cold War, there was something that civil society or academics could have done differently or could have done something to influence that failure. Prevent might be a big word, but basically, is there something that the civil society could have done differently in this field in that period of the last 30 years?

Melissa Parke: I think what happened was after the end of the Cold War, most people thought the issue had gone away. I'm not saying that about the civil society that's involved in disarmament, but the rest of the broader community thought that that it wasn't such an issue anymore with the end of the Cold War. But nuclear weapons have never gone away. There have been reductions in the arsenals but they're still there and there are still over 12,000 existing in the world, and that's 12,000 too many. So, I'd be very hesitant to criticise, you know, civil society and (...) I think what we need to do is look at where we are now, and the risk that is there right now, and what are we doing about that? I think we are acting.

Michal Onderco: Do you think that in the period since the 90s, there were periods when things could have gone in a different direction and they didn't? Were there any milestones where you think 'we were cusp on doing things better but we didn't do it'?

Melissa Parke: Oh, I think it's a missed opportunity for the international community, when there was this the end of the Cold War. That was the moment that should have been seized to deal with nuclear weapons. Gorbachev and Reagan came close to eliminating their nuclear arsenals, agreeing to eliminate. But sadly not, however they did reduce them significantly. I think that was a real missed opportunity for the world. And, I don't know that there's anyone to blame but, apart from the nuclear armed states who haven't done what they should have done. ICAN has existed since 2007, when it was started by a small group of people in Australia. And so, you know, civil society hasn't been sitting around doing nothing. They started this campaign. They got the Humanitarian Initiative going together with support of states like Austria and Mexico and Ireland and Norway and others. And so this initiative built up over, over time and ended up with the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and those states who were supporting it who were leading the charge, if you like, obviously also South Africa and others as well. They are also the states that are very active in the NPT. So I think they've been doing what they can all along, and it's only the nuclear armed states that have failed to do what they should be doing.

Michal Onderco: Okay. I want to now move to a different part of the of the interview. So imagine someone is reading this interview in 20 years. And they have never heard about ICAN. What do they need to know about ICAN, to understand your organization?

Melissa Parke: Okay, as I mentioned, ICAN was started in 2007 by a small group of people sitting around the kitchen table in Melbourne, Australia, asking themselves what they could do to rid the world of the world's worst weapons. And they decided, in light of the failure of the nuclear armed states to disarm in accordance with the NPT, they decided to start a campaign along the lines of the successful earlier campaigns to ban landmines and cluster munitions, with the idea that you prohibit the weapons and they become legally and morally unacceptable to use. As we've seen with the chemical and biological weapons, and the landmines and cluster munitions. There are isolated uses of those weapons from time to time, but we see that it is morally frowned upon and condemned by the international community. We know that all

member states are sensitive to criticism in the international community, no matter what their behavior, they are all sensitive to criticism and to being seen as being out of step with the international community. So norms do work. And we know from the fact that the US sent a memo to its NATO allies in October 2016 before the negotiation of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, warning those NATO states that that this treaty had the potential to interfere with nuclear training, exercises, with nuclear planning, had the potential to undermine nuclear deterrence. Which shows that the nuclear armed states, and in this case, the United States, understand very well the power of this kind of norm-making process. They understood exactly the point behind the Treaty as shown in their memo. That is exactly what the point of the treaty was.

Michal Onderco: Yeah. And one of the things that is different a little bit from it when it comes to, ICAN compared to other civil society organizations, is that ICAN is really a campaign....

Melissa Parke: Yes, we've got around 700 partner organizations now, all around the world. it's very grassroots. Our partners are from all different kinds of backgrounds. There are some medical association partners, environmental, trade unions, you know, all kinds of different areas. So that's very powerful. That means we have links down to the grassroots in every country where our partners exist. And that's how we've been able to mobilize more than I'm not sure how many hundreds of cities around the world, especially in nuclear armed states, like Paris and New York and Washington DC and Berlin. And obviously, here Geneva, Zurich, Rome, and others, . These cities say that their governments should support the treaty because, of course, cities are the primary targets of nuclear weapons, they have a direct interest in this. We've also managed to mobilize financial institutions, \$4 trillion of assets under management, saying they will not invest in nuclear weapons. There are lots of large pension funds and others. And that message is getting out, at levels below federal government, in the societies. And we believe that this this will be successful. In fact, I don't know if you know but yesterday, we, ICAN as part of a, popular initiative in Switzerland, will call for the government to sign the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. We need to collect 100,000 signatures to have a referendum on the subject. We're doing that because we can here in Switzerland, there is a process to enable that. It's not so easy in other countries, you can't force a referendum on anything. But here in Switzerland, as long as you get the 100,000 signatures, the government has to do it. So it's very powerful. And, you know, we think that this is this is a message that will resonate, particularly in this environment, where people are saying the nuclear risk is high now.

Michal Onderco: I wanted to get to this a little later, but since you started, the idea of signing TPNW in Switzerland, but also in other countries, brings ICAN together with some of the... I would call them 'strange bedfellows'. So in Switzerland, it's also the far right who wants to sign TPNW because it wants to make harder the cooperation with NATO. In Germany, it's the Alternative for Germany, also a far right party, that sort of wants the country to sign the TPNW because they want the American nukes out of the country and Germany out of NATO. How do you think about the fact that some of the actions that you do, I'm not saying you collaborate with them, but some of the actions that you do, also sort of overlap with the actions of some of these, let's call them 'unsavory movements'. Does it pose an ethical dilemma for you or not at all?

Melissa Parke: Well, that's politics. I can give you an example. When I was in the parliament and I was from the center- left party. I was campaigning on an issue with someone from, say, the far right, because we both agreed on this particular issue. And we were advocates. Multinational corporations were taking out patents over human genes, including breast cancer genes, ovarian cancer genes, and preventing hospitals and scientists from doing research on those genes unless they paid a big fee to the corporation. We both agreed and maybe coming from different perspectives, but we both agreed that that was outrageous, that human genes should not be able to be patented, even the defective ones. And so we both appeared on late night television. I didn't see any problem in doing that because the cause was just. And in this case, the cause is just. You know, I think everybody has the capacity to do good things and bad things in their lives. If people are choosing to do good things, then I think that is to be supported. It doesn't mean you support everything else they do, but that is to be applauded.

Michal Onderco: One of the big challenges for civil society organizations is always leadership transition. The organization has recently gone through a leadership transition. And you had previously a leader who was very high profile and who was sort of broadly well known. So it even made the leadership transition probably even more difficult. So what would be your advice to leaders of civil society organizations in the nuclear field? How to manage the leadership transition plan?

Melissa Parke: I think people just have to be themselves. And I was appointed for my own particular background and skills, which are quite different from that of Beatrice.

Michal Onderco: So what would you say are the main differences between the two of you?

Melissa Parke: Well, first we have much more in common than we have differences in the sense that we're both very passionate about this issue and about civil society being able to make a difference. You know, Bea was an extremely effective person, in the field. And we still collaborate very much on these issues. So, my background as a former Member of Parliament, as someone who worked for the United Nations, is an added bonus in a way.

Michal Onderco: In the course of this project, I interviewed a number of people who are on the International advisory board of ICAN or who have been, in one way or another, associated with ICAN. One of the things that they very often said about, the previous Executive Director, was that she was incredibly efficient in lobbying and she was a fantastic fundraiser. Do you find that those two have been very important to the functions in a leader of civil society organizations?

Melissa Parke: I think, in every civil society organization, you need good advocates. And, you know, the best fundraisers are going to be those who care passionately and can speak articulately about their cause. And so no doubt that she was very successful at those things. And I hope that I will be too.

Michal Onderco: If you look at, the internal structure of the organization, so you have the bureau here, and then you have the advisory board, which is composed of 12 or 13 organizations, and then you have the 700 partners all across the world. How would you describe to someone who has never heard of ICAN the relations between them, between these three parts?

Melissa Parke: Well, we don't micromanage our partner organizations. Basically, our partner

organizations are organizations that agree with the objective of a world free of nuclear weapons and with the treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons being the main pathway to achieving that objective. And, as long as they're not acting inconsistently with those objectives, then they set their own goals and practices. And it works very well. We regularly update our campaign partners concerning the activities we're doing. We encourage them to be involved, where, you know, they can and where they have the resources and the interest. And we do we try to ensure that every region has some coverage. We're at all times remembering and focusing on our partners. We're very grateful for our partners because they make this whole thing possible, and of course, as I mentioned, the International Steering Group is made up of partner organizations. In fact, we've got an open call out now for more organizations to join the International Steering Group. So that'll be good to see more, more people coming on board and organizations from abroad. That's basically how it works.

Michal Onderco: In the course of my interviews, I interviewed for a number of civil society representatives who are not based in Europe or in the United States. And one of the things that I often hear, even from organizations which are very friendly and have even in the past financially supporting the ICAN, was that ICAN is a very Western-oriented organization. I interviewed last year Hirotoku Terasaki from Soka Gakkai, and one of the things that he said is that his main criticism of ICAN is that it's a Western-oriented organization. Do you ever hear that criticism, and do you recognize it, or is this something that you think is a fundamental misunderstanding of ICAN?

Melissa Parke: I have heard that, I've heard that it's Eurocentric, that it's Geneva-centric. Which, is understandable given that we are based in Geneva and we are based in Europe. That is an obvious criticism and something I would like to work on. Given more resources, I would like to see us expand our footprint further and increase our diversity. But I think we're doing what we can within the resources we have for the present time.

Michal Onderco: If you look at the ecosystem of NGOs in the nuclear field, maybe here in Geneva, or more globally. Who would you say, maybe for you personally, or for the Bureau is here in Geneva, who are the closest partners for cooperation?

Melissa Parke: Well, we obviously work closely with IPPNW, which has a branch here, and with the International Campaign to Ban Landmines. We work with the World Council of Churches, and we work quite variously with different groups on various subjects. I've just become one of the gender champions, so I'll be doing work with them as well. I think those are the primary ones in Geneva.

(Note: I may have misunderstood the question. I thought you were talking about which ICAN partner organizations do we work with in Geneva. But if you mean the question more generally, we obviously work closely with United Nations offices, agencies and special mechanisms (such as human rights special rapporteurs), the International Committee of the Red Cross, and with diplomatic missions and representatives of member states).

Michal Onderco: How important is academia for you? And what would you consider to be most influential academics in this field for your work today?

Melissa Parke: (Note: Academia is critically important on this issue.) I don't know if you've spoken with Alicia.

Michal Onderco: I have exchanged emails, but I never managed to speak with her.

Melissa Parke: Yeah. It might be a good idea for you to speak to her because she's basically organizes our research and she's in contact with all of the academics.

Michal Onderco: /s there someone you would consider as being important for the way how you view either your mission or the nuclear weapons today?

Melissa Parke: Yes, there's a number of them. Bonnie Docherty at Harvard, Nick Ritchie at the University of York, there's Benoit Pelopidas, and Alex Wellerstein. Benoit is at Sciences Po I think. Professor Tilman Ruff from Australia, who was one of the co-founders of ICAN and one of the IPPNW chairs. There's Dr. Ruth Mitchell and Dimity Hawkins in Australia. Ivana Hughes, in the United States, scientist and , academic, and Ray Acheson.

(Note: The TPNW has a Scientific Advisory Group (SAG), which plays an important role in investigating and disseminating evidence concerning the risks and the humanitarian and environmental impacts of nuclear weapons. The co-chairs of the SAG, Prof Zia Mian of Princeton University and Prof Patricia Lewis of Chatham House are influential academics/scientists in the field)

Michal Onderco: Of course, there are civil society organizations that don't necessarily share all the goals. So for example, those who work more on risk reduction. Are there any of those that influenced the way how you think about things, how you think about the world, or someone who is maybe not in the same ... I don't want to say 'ideological space' because that sounds really bad... but sort of we might not necessarily, for example, share the goal of nuclear abolition, but whose ideas you think are worth reading?

Melissa Parke: Yes, I'd say Professor Gareth Evans, former Australian foreign minister and former chair of the International Commission on Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, set up under the Rudd government when I was in parliament. He obviously shares the goal of a nuclear weapons free world. He's very critical of the theory of nuclear deterrence, believes that the risks far outweigh the benefits. But at the same time, regarding the treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, he believes it is an admirable goal, but that the focus should really be on risk reduction. So he would be someone that I would still read, even though he has that perspective. I'm sure there are others.

Michal Onderco: Yes. And, you know.

Melissa Parke: I really appreciate the work of the Asia-Pacific Leadership Network, and the European Leadership Network on these issues. I think they have a really great balanced perspective where they welcome views from all sides. Also, the Arms Control Association we do read, and take note of what they are saying.

Michal Onderco: One of the things that I often hear as a complaint from different civil society organizations is that there is an utter lack of funding in this field. And before we started the interview, I mentioned that the fact that there has been a declining number of funders has been a problem. ICAN has been a really successful, received a Nobel Peace Prize recently.

Would you say that this idea that there is a lack of funding applies even to a successful organization like ICAN?

Melissa Parke: I would say that's true. That is difficult, and I think part of the issue is that nuclear weapons and the whole disarmament field is seen as a niche area. you know, there's funding by particular organizations for disarmament and security work. I think that the fundamental problem with that is that it shouldn't be confined in that way. I don't believe that the whole issue of nuclear weapons should be confined to the silos of disarmament and security. Nuclear weapons have such an impact on every aspect of life and subject matter, whether it's environment or human rights or health or food security, refugees or humanitarian actions. I think there should be funding, based on that fact that nuclear weapons endanger all of it, endangers the Sustainable Development Goals, all of them. So, there's an artificial restriction on the funding, but in reality, I think there's a lot of money out there for good causes. And I am very hopeful that we will see some of that funding to come to ICAN and other organizations in the disarmament field because, it really does impact on all of those other areas.

Michal Onderco: One of the benefits that your organization, given that it's slightly bigger than many other in this space, is that you also have more staff. So when you hire staff, what are the qualities that you find most important about the people that you work with?

Melissa Parke: From the moment I've come into this organization, I've noted that it has been a "low ego, high impact" mentality. So I think having people who care passionately about the issue, most of our staff are younger people and we see a lot of energy and they're very dedicated and knowledgeable. But most important, I think, is dedication and commitment to the field

Michal Onderco: I remember I interviewed Beatrice shortly before her departure. And one of the things that she said, that it's important that this movement is inclusive for what she called 17 year old TikToker and 80 year old nun.

Melissa Parke: Yes

Michal Onderco: And one of the things that I often hear, especially when I speak with people who have been more experienced, is that they find it very difficult to attract the young people into the field, and the organization has succeeded in attracting a lot of young people in the field. What do you think is the key to attract the young people to the cause of nuclear disarmament?

Melissa Parke: Well, because it's about their future. And that nuclear weapons imperil their future. That's why they're so attracted to issues like climate change and species extinction, because it all relates to the future. And, one of the fundamental problems, not only from the increased risk, but also because of the impact on future generations, is the increasing number and modernization of nuclear arsenals. It is extending that burden on the young, on younger generations, well into the future. Something, you know, that was basically a legacy from the Cold War that is now extending, you know, decades into the future when it should be stopped. And so I think it's robbing from future generations, the chance for better environment, better health. And the idea of being secure in the world. The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists has

correctly identified nuclear weapons and the environment crisis as existential threats that need to be dealt with simultaneously. But I would also go further and say that weapons are like climate change on steroids or at supersonic speed. So if anything, we should be prioritizing eliminating nuclear weapons. . If we were able to achieve the elimination of nuclear weapons, that would provide the global cooperation that is needed to deal with those other global challenges, as well as freeing up the \$91 billion that are currently being spent every year on nuclear arsenals. And a lot of scientists and researchers currently working in nuclear weapons industries that would be able to work on other pressing issues for humanity. So there's a lot of benefits that would come from immediately tackling nuclear weapons, quite aside from reducing the immediate risk level

Michal Onderco: As I mentioned at the very beginning, one of the questions, one of the big overarching questions for this research is the question of impact in the nuclear field. How would you know that your organization has impact? or how do you define impact in your work as a leader in ICAN?

Melissa Parke: Well, by the number of countries that sign and ratify the treaty, the number of cities that sign on to the ICAN Cities Appeal. The amount of money divested from nuclear weapons industries. The discussions in the media about this topic and about the TPNW. All of those, all of those issues are the kinds of things that we will look at in assessing our impact.

Michal Onderco: If one looks, for example, the number of countries that have signed and ratified the TPNW, the number has very slowly been sort of increasing. In the last two years, there has been only a handful of countries that have ratified in the last few years. Would that mean that your impact in the last few years has declined?

Melissa Parke: I think it's a very normal process for a treaty that in the beginning, you have a whole bunch of countries signing up, and then the next signatures and ratification take a longer time. That's quite normal. And we're at about the same number of ratifications and signatures as the NPT had at a similar time in its history. We are expecting Indonesia, for instance, to ratify this year. Indonesia is the fourth largest country in the world. I mean, this is a massive event for this treaty. So we think it is going as we expected. Obviously, we would love to increase the number of signatures and ratifications, faster. But it was never meant to be a quick outcome. It's about building norms.

Michal Onderco: And would you say that it's important for you to, for example, get states possessing nuclear weapons on board, to get them to ratify, for example, the treaty. Or do you think that that goal is so unlikely that it's not even worth spending the resources on it? [...]

Melissa Parke: The whole reason for having the treaty is because the nuclear armed states were not disarming. So we don't expect the nuclear armed states to join the treaty soon. The whole point of it is to get other countries to join it and then ultimately the pressure will come, on those nuclear armed states to voluntarily disarm. To hear the message from the rest of the international community that these weapons are endangering the collective security of humanity. It's not just about them, it's about the whole world. And they have a responsibility to everybody else to get rid of those weapons.

Michal Onderco: Would you say that your organization is successful in executing its mission? Would you say that you are a successful organization at this moment?

Melissa Parke: Absolutely. Yes.

Michal Onderco: I ask that every organization and it's not always the answer that I get that they are, that they feel that they are successful.

Melissa Parke: We're increasing our partner organizations, we're increasing the number of cities. We're raising awareness. We've had a huge amount of media interest in a report we just released a couple of weeks ago on spending, \$91 billion a year being spent on nuclear weapons. I mean, there is a lot of interest in this subject and the media is coming to ICAN to ask us about it. And that's great. That's what we want. [...]

Melissa Parke: Another point I wanted to make is that there is increased pop culture attention on nuclear weapons at the moment that's happened through things like the Oppenheimer film, the new release of Godzilla, through Annie Jacobson's new book, Nuclear War: A scenario. Best selling book, which is reportedly going to be made into a film by Denis Villeneuve, the director of the Dune movies. I think there is a momentum that's there now, and we're taking advantage of those opportunities to raise public awareness that nuclear weapons are a problem, not a solution, but also that there is an answer, and that is the Treaty on the Prohibition of Weapons.

Michal Onderco: Do you mentioned the film Oppenheimer. Do you think that that film was in general good for the cause of nuclear disarmament? Did it help advance the cause of nuclear disarmament?

Melissa Parke: Yes, I think I it has raised global consciousness about nuclear weapons again, which is a good thing. Even if you could criticize aspects of the film that didn't focus very much, or barely at all on the consequences of use of those nuclear weapons, for the Japanese people and for the downwinders who suffered in the United States as well. It didn't go into that. But I think it did raise awareness and it has spawned a whole lot of other movies that are coming out and TV series like Fallout, for instance.

Michal Onderco: So on balance, it was good for the cause of nuclear disarmament.

Melissa Parke: I think it was very good for raising awareness about nuclear weapons, bringing it back to public consciousness, when it had had gone away for some time.

Michal Onderco: I feel an unpronounced 'but' in that answer, because you say it was good for raising consciousness, and I feel like there is a continuation of that sentence, '...but'. Or am I misunderstanding?

Melissa Parke: There might be some who think that nuclear weapons have been glamorized by it in a way, because there was no focus on the humanitarian environmental impact on the ground under the mushroom cloud, just the mushroom cloud itself. It could be that people get a sense of the magnitude of these weapons, but without a sense of the consequences. But at the same time, that's why we do what we do. We raise awareness about the consequences. So I think altogether it's been a positive.

Michal Onderco: Okay. Has the war in Ukraine made your campaigning and advocacy easier or more difficult?

Melissa Parke: It goes both ways. Because again, since nuclear threats were made, it has made people much more aware and, put them on alert about nuclear weapons. Again, since the Cold War. But at the same time, it's made a lot of European countries more fearful and to turn inwards and cling to NATO as the nuclear alliance: Of course, NATO isn't a nuclear alliance as per its founding documents, it's just a political decision for it to be a nuclear alliance, which could be changed. So that has made some aspects of our work more difficult, more challenging, particularly in countries that like Sweden, for instance, that have traditionally been very anti-nuclear.

Michal Onderco: Just earlier this week, Beatrice Fihn, on her Twitter called NATO "a Ponzi scheme". I know that she's not a member or she's not no longer associated with ICAN, but would you say that this this would sort of gel with the way how NATO is viewed within your organization?

Melissa Parke: I don't really know what that means.

Michal Onderco: She used that that, that sort of metaphor to call it a Ponzi scheme. So. Yeah.

Melissa Parke: As I said, we focus on the weapons themselves rather than on particular states. and we talk to all countries, including NATO countries. Many of them are engaging with the TPNW as observers, and have done since the beginning. We encourage that, and we hope that one day they will go further and join the treaty.

Michal Onderco: I have, in the course of my research, I have spoken to a number of ICAN campaigners in a number of European NATO countries, and one of the, things that I understood from them is that the shift in NATO capitals and in capitals of NATO countries has moved so much during the after the war in Ukraine that it is now completely futile to campaign for joining the treaty. And the goal has shifted to campaign for attending the meetings of state parties as observers. Because the goal of joining the treaty is completely seen as unreachable.

Melissa Parke: Well, certainly in the short term by many states it is seen as unreachable. Yes, I heard that. But, on the other hand, you only need a change of government and that can change like that. So we don't give up on any state joining the treaty and we keep going.

Michal Onderco: If you look at the map of Europe today, do you see any, any country where a new government could, for example, could bring about, for example, a move towards signing the TPNW?

Melissa Parke: Spain, maybe? There's very strong movement in Italy against nuclear weapons. There's, Scotland obviously, which hosts nuclear weapons. British nuclear weapons are not supported, really, by people in Scotland. If Scotland were to become independent and I know that's not happening soon, but that could be an example of a nuclear armed state disarming albeit involuntarily, since there wouldn't be anywhere else for those nuclear weapons to go. Countries like Norway, like Germany, Belgium, I don't think we discount any countries possibly in the future changing their policies because historically, those countries have been sympathetic.

Michal Onderco: I'm now moving to the last part of the interview, and we started to talk about the future, which is good because I'm looking I'm the last part of the interview asked about the future. So from where you sit, what are your main expectations for the field for the sort of next five to 15 to 50 years? Where do you think the field is going to go? And some people find it easier to answer this question when I ask them, do you think there will be nuclear weapons in 50 years?

Melissa Parke: In 50 years? Einstein was once asked what would be the weapons of World War III. He said, 'I don't know, but the weapons of World War IV will be sticks and stones.'

Michal Onderco: So.

Melissa Parke: I think if we had nuclear weapons in 50 years human civilization wouldn't be still existing. Okay, they have to be gone well before then. Statistically, I've seen researchers estimating the probability of nuclear war by mistake, for example, by the US or Russia believing that the other side has launched a nuclear strike, the probability of a war starting in that way as being around 1% per annum. Now, that doesn't stay at 1%, that that rises over time. So the longer period of time you have with nuclear weapons, the more chances there are that there will be a nuclear war, whether by accident or design. And so, we cannot afford to have decades more of nuclear weapons because at some point or another, they're going to be used. And that's why we need to see the back of nuclear weapons within 15 years. And, and I hope earlier.

Michal Onderco: Earlier than 15 years.

Melissa Parke: This is what I hope. But I mean, I'm trying to be realistic here. I would hope by 2035.

Michal Onderco: They will be...

Melissa Parke: Gone. That's what I'm hoping. So that's less than 15 years.

Michal Onderco: Yeah. my mortgage will still not be paid off, so that would be good. One thing that I always ask respondents at the end is, imagine there is a world without nuclear weapons. So nuclear weapons are gone. How does that world look like? Is there anything different about that world compared to the world today? And particularly, does the security in such a world look differently to security in the world today?

Melissa Parke: Look, it's not likely that wars are going to stop. And we know that conventional weapons are becoming increasingly more powerful. You know states, if they eliminated their nuclear weapons, that would not mean they were defenseless. All of the nuclear armed states have big conventional militaries as well. So, I don't think that that aspect of life will change, but the element that is the risk that a nuclear weapon could end life on Earth at any moment would be gone. There's nothing else that comes close to the ability of nuclear weapons to destroy all complex life on Earth.

Michal Onderco: Would war in such a world be more or less likely compared to the world today?

Melissa Parke: Well, I don't think nuclear weapons have stopped wars. I mean, there are many wars going on, and there have been, you know, the whole time. And they haven't deterred

attacks on nuclear weapon states. They haven't deterred wars between nuclear weapon states. I don't think nuclear weapons have deterred war.

Michal Onderco: It's in other words, the probability of a war occurring is unchanged by nuclear disarmament. In your view?

Melissa Parke: The probability of the end of the Earth from war certainly changes, with the absence of nuclear weapons.

(Note: Importantly, the global cooperation required to eliminate nuclear weapons may bring about increased cooperation on other global challenges as well, thereby reducing conflict in the world.)

Michal Onderco: Yes. Well, thank you very much for your time. And I have run through all of my questions that I had for you. And at the very end, I generally tend to ask people if they want, if there's anything that they want to add, if they if there's something that they think is important to be said in an interview about civil society and nuclear disarmament that I haven't asked about. So you also have a chance to add anything that you might want to add

Melissa Parke: There can be no nuclear weapons on a sustainable planet. And the elimination of nuclear weapons is an essential part of protecting the planet, the climate, humanity and all living things.

Michal Onderco: That's all I'd say. Thank you very much.