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Interview with Sarah Mabeza

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Summary:

Sarah Mabeza, a regional legal adviser for the ICRC, combines her passion for African diplomacy with a focus on nuclear disarmament. She emphasizes Africa's leadership in the TPNW process, attributing success to collaboration with think tanks and civil society organizations. Mabeza highlights South Africa's moral authority and convening power as key factors in mobilizing the African bloc for disarmament. She underscores the importance of sustained engagement and education to amplify Africa's role in global nuclear policy. This document summary was generated by an artificial intelligence language model and was reviewed by a Wilson Center staff member.

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Robin Möser: Okay, this is Sarah Mabeza talking to me, Robin Möser, today 22 May 2024, for the project "Civil Society and Nuclear Risk". Sarah attended the University of KwaZulu Natal and completed her LLB degree in 2007 with Distinction. She completed a LLM in Human Rights and Democratization in Africa from the Center for Human Rights at University of Pretoria, also with distinction. And since February 2009, she's been working with the International Committee of the Red Cross in various roles. And since 2011, she's the regional legal adviser. Sarah works closely with several regional organizations such as the SADC, the Southern African Development Community and the Pan African Parliament. And I'm very interested to hear about that in greater detail. And she also has links to international think tanks and civil society organizations, NGOs, etc. And I saw online that you published an op-ed in 2017 about the TPNW and Africa being a role model in the process of ratification of the Treaty. So yeah, having said all this, I would be interested to hear how did you get into the position you are currently in, what is your background other than the legal studies I just mentioned, and why did you end up at the ICRC?

Sarah Mabeza: Okay, that's a good question. And I think I've always had an understanding that I wanted to study law, but not to be a lawyer in the traditional sense. So that was quite clear to me. And then in the final year of our law degree, all my friends and colleagues were applying for their articles at law firms, and I was the only one who didn't and it's seemed a bit reckless at that time, but I just knew that I wanted to use my law for something else. I've always been incredibly passionate about Africa, South Africa particularly, but the continent at large as well. And so I just had this desire to use my law degree to better our continent. And so that's what led me to the LLM, the masters that I did in Human Rights and Democratization in Africa. And my joining the ICRC was interesting. I was without a job after my master's and I happened to have a business card of the head of the Pretoria delegation of the ICRC as she provided us with one lecture in our master's degree. I just sent her an email to say is there anything, and it turns out that that very day, they were opening a position for a legal assistant. I thought I would join the ICRC for one year only because I was a human rights person, not an International Humanitarian Law (IHL) person. And so, here I am in my 16th year now with the ICRC, so you can tell I fell in love with it, with IHL.

Robin Möser: Okay, great. And when you started this position, was it already in the field you're working in currently or is it different fields that you straddled?

Sarah Mabeza: The role that I've played, I first started as a legal assistant and then two years later, I was promoted to regional legal advisor. And it's quite interesting, I think, because I think from the outside ICRC legal advisors are seen as very niched, you know, focusing very specifically on IHL, but for us once we're in a position, we see it as really a jack of all trades position. And so, you know, one day we're working on the Hague Convention on Cultural Property with Mali, and then the next day we're working on, for example, the TPNW with Norway. And then the next day we're in another country, doing a training on sexual violence in times of conflict. So, I would say that my overall function has been the same since I joined the ICRC all those years ago, but no one day has ever been the same.

Robin Möser: Okay. So you're generalists, I'd say.

Sarah Mabeza: Ja, a generalist with an IHL emphasis I would say, yes, with a particular passion for the disarmament file.

Robin Möser: Speaking of that, how do you view the role of nukes in world politics today? Do you attribute any stabilizing factor to them when you look at global politics? Do you think they matter or don't?

Sarah Mabeza: I think that's quite a difficult question for me to answer for two reasons. The first one is due to my neutrality being an employee of the ICRC. I would have to answer that in my personal capacity. But then in my personal capacity, it's also difficult, because I think I'm a self-confessed idealist. Often my colleagues tease me, although sometimes it proves to be a good thing as it was in this process pushing for the TPNW. So my framework, the lens that I look through when I view geopolitics, is often more idealistic than many other people. And the other thing that I would say is that although I've been passionate about the disarmament file, particularly nukes, for many years, I definitely would not consider myself an expert in disarmament or non-proliferation. But I would rather consider myself an expert in, if I can say, work that is really more along the lines of African diplomacy. And I think that's where my interest in the TPNW file came from. So I've been passionate about mobilizing the power of the African bloc, for good, and the TPNW happened to be one of the best examples of where that really came to fruition.

Robin Möser: To sort of galvanize this?

Sarah Mabeza: Yes, exactly, exactly. And so that's where... I think I come at this whole discussion on nuclear disarmament more from that angle. And so I would say that I'm not the most interesting person to talk to you about the geopolitical arena. You know, I have more to say on the African side, if that makes sense.

Robin Möser: That makes sense. And this is exactly what I'm also after, because we look in this project at different world regions, and how for example the TPNW came into being and how the diplomatic tussle behind it, sort of unfolded. So, I would be interested to hear more about that: when you started working on the issue and about the background negotiations and links to other African think tanks, for example people you worked etc.

Sarah Mabeza: Yeah, it was really, you know, I'm sure we'll have lots of time to talk about the role the ICRC particularly played in this process. But one of the things I would say is that, I think, not to sound too biased, I think that the ICRC played an extremely crucial role in launching the process that led to the TPNW. And I think many think tanks and civil society organizations would agree with that. And that was really the 2010 statement that was delivered by the ICRC president at the time, Jacob Kellenberger. And that statement was quite foundational, in that it represented one of the first times there was a shift in the focus on the dialogue on nukes to talk to States directly about nuclear disarmament from the humanitarian perspective. And a lot of people would say that it was that statement along with other factors, of course, that really resulted in noise around the issue and then in the Humanitarian Initiative. And so I think that that statement in 2010, I joined the ICRC a year before that statement happened. At the time, I didn't even really understand its importance, because I was new to the field, I didn't realize how different that statement was to all the other statements that have been made in the past about the file. And shortly after that the Council of Delegates of National Red Cross and Red Cross Societies, they adopted a resolution in 2011 on nuclear disarmament. And again, one of the first times that we had something at the global level with all national societies from all countries in the world agreeing on this need for nuclear disarmament. So, that kind of caught my attention. But you're absolutely right, that it was the role of think tanks and civil society that moved us

on from that, you know. The ICRC's role, I see as a convening power. And I think the ICRC is great at providing a platform for engagement. But we absolutely need to partner with other organizations who can do a lot more than we can do. And that's what happened. For example with Noel Stott from the Institute for Security Studies in Pretoria. Noel and I worked together extremely closely. Okay, so for us in South Africa, it was actually the ISS who initiated taking it from what the ICRC had done at the global level, and now initiating it to what can we do at the continental level. And that was really down to Noel and his team, who had quite good contacts with DIRCO (the Department of International Relations and Cooperation). So what was so crucial, I think, about the ISS, is that they had a strong relationship with the DIRCO disarmament desk. From my perspective at least, really, at least in the work that I do, DIRCO through its disarmament desk has been and continues to be one of the shining stars on the continent.

Robin Möser: When the project started, it would have been Johann Kellerman, right?

Sarah Mabeza: It was Johann Kellerman, right. Then after his retirement Marthinus van Schalkwyk took over as Director. He's recently moved to New York. And now it's being run by Michiel Combrink. So Michiel Combrink worked very closely with Johann Kellerman. And in my personal opinion the Disarmament Directorate is still a shining light within DIRCO. So, I think that was excellent that we were dealing with an incredibly passionate Directorate. Noel Stott, through the ISS, not only did he have a great relationship with DIRCO, but also he had the funding. And that was crucial as well, because the work that we did together from, I would say, I think we started in about 2013 to 2017, it was big. This wasn't something we could achieve by having small meetings, by having online meetings, by taking one step at a time, we needed to gather the African continent in one room face to face on multiple occasions. And I genuinely think that's what resulted in the success that we had. And that came from ISS (the funding that they had), but also then from ILPI - the International Law and Policy Institute in Oslo, who don't exist anymore if I'm not mistaken, but at the time had all this funding to work globally on nuclear disarmament. We made a partnership between the three of us, ICRC Pretoria, ILPI, and ISS Pretoria. And we just ran with it for four years together. And yeah, what we did, I think would not have been achieved without ILPI and ISS's involvement. I think we all brought something different to the table. You know, what I think what the ICRC brought was our network of government stakeholders, because the ICRC has delegations across the African continent, and I have counterparts across the continent who work closely with governments in the region they cover, and were able to help identify the right people within government working on the disarmament file. And ISS brought the African civil society and think tank contacts, which we didn't necessarily have.

Robin Möser: Who would these be, can you name a few of them?

Sarah Mabeza: The African Council for Religious Leaders, IPPNW, WILPF etc. And the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) - the contact person from IANSA for Africa is Joseph Dube. Joseph is also the South African representative of ICAN. So there were big ones, like those partners, but there was also small ones, like a relatively unknown NGO from a West African country, you know, who happened to have a good relationship with their government. And ISS knew those people. So they knew those people, we knew the government people, ILPI with the international perspective and they brought the funding, which is great. And together, we just started organizing events, basically. I always hesitate to say events, because I think, you know, when you think of an event, you think of a talk shop. But we were really trying our best to make these have as much impact as possible and the first thing was to get the right people in the room. So we worked hard at that.

Robin Möser: The process you described just now happened between 2011 to 2013, that kind of period?

Sarah Mabeza: Oh, I was looking in my emails earlier this morning to check and the first event that I could find that we co-hosted together was in early 2013. I think we started early 2013. You know who else was there? The United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR). They were a part of it as well, John Borrie from UNIDIR was there. So that's in 2013. And then we had events in Zambia, in Addis Ababa in Ethiopia, retreats in South Africa, two different retreats that I can remember. And I think that those went up until about 2016.

Robin Möser: Okay, so the ICRC's focus was it outright targeting the whole continent or did this gradually happen this decisively African focus?

Sarah Mabeza: So the ICRC focus was global. And then my focus as the Legal Adviser from the Pretoria delegation was continental. And you know, the way it works for us, we have five regional legal advisors on the continent. And we usually focus on our region. So my region is Southern Africa. But I think the reason we went continental with this, which is probably one of the reasons I was so passionate about it, is because of South Africa. So I think I can say that if this file needed an African champion it was probably going to be South Africa. And quickly the South African government became crucial to everything that we did on the continent for the adoption of the TPNW.

Robin Möser: Do you think this was because of South Africa's normative power having dismantled nuclear weapons in the early 1990s?

Sarah Mabeza: I think it was a combination of things. Certainly, the moral authority that South Africa had, as you know, being the only country to have voluntarily disbanded. And secondly, Mandela made a few very interesting statements on disarmament, nuclear disarmament, and Bishop Desmond Tutu was still alive at the time. And he was making statements still in his old age about the need for nuclear disarmament. So morally, there was some very interesting meat to work with. Apart from that, the second one would be South Africa's leadership role. In my personal opinion there's absolutely no doubt that South Africa plays a leadership role on the continent on certain issues, including in the development of norms. But then thirdly, and for us, this was probably the most interesting, is not only the leadership role that South Africa plays, but the bridge building role that South Africa plays. And that's what I find the most fascinating. And so this is the role that South Africa plays by convening States together, providing them with an opportunity to perhaps address disconnects in terms of law or policy. And in my opinion they do it often and they do it well.

Robin Möser: And where did this bridge-building role happen, in the kind of workshops you just mentioned or is unfolding at the next level where diplomats pursue this issue?

Sarah Mabeza: Both I think. We see it often at many levels, we saw it as well with the adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty, and that was in 2012/2013. And that was actually, I think it's one of the reasons why we felt like, let's push Africa and the TPNW, because we had a recent success story in the Arms Trade Treaty, where we saw the African bloc coming together to push for this important treaty. So within the Arms Trade Treaty, we already saw South Africa playing this convening role for States that had similar policy positions, but were maybe not connecting. I think this is often successful because South Africa brings an experienced voice.

Robin Möser: Yeah. I mean, what you just said a bit earlier about this bridge building role South Africa head, I recall a book, actually by one of the project leaders. And he credited South Africa for this bridge-building role in the NPT RevCon in 1995. So, that is not too surprising. But looking at this normative edge now, do you think that it has vanished, I mean the moral leadership the South Africans enjoyed back then? Is it still there?

Sarah Mabeza: Speaking now in my personal capacity, and as a South African myself, I think over the last decade we have certainly seen shifts in foreign policy priorities, where there was maybe a reluctance to engage on certain thematics at the international level, and it was much more of a focus domestically. But there also continues to be a recognition of the importance of still playing that role at the international level. So it's waned, and it's come back. It's dipped, and you know, risen, I think. Within DIRCO, I have mostly dealt with the career diplomats who were passionate about this file and found a way to make it work, regardless of what was necessarily happening at the political level. I think a lot of people would say that the recent ICJ case that South Africa brought, they would say that it's evidence that there is still this willingness to play this role. I believe that the South African Government has continued to play this role to some extent the whole time. Sometimes it's just been more behind the scenes than others. And I see it still playing this role today, for example, on cyber warfare, where the South African government is very active and has been very, very strong in their public statements on the applicability of IHL to cyber warfare in the face of many powerful states who disagree. So I see it continuing. But I know that some people would call that naïve.

Robin Möser: I won't judge... Okay, and speaking from your experience and interaction with the ICRC and other partners, how would you describe the relative position of your organization in the nuclear disarmament-TPNW nexus, both continentally and globally?

Sarah Mabeza: Okay. I think the ICRC has its flaws, like any organization. But two things jump out to me as having been crucial in the role that we played within this plethora of other organizations that were involved. One of them, I've already mentioned to you, which is our convening power. And so I think we are in a position where if states receive an invitation from an organization like the ICRC to an event, they know already, that it's a trusted partner. It's someone where they can be safe, saying what they need to say. So I think that's just the nature of being ICRC, it's nothing particular that we did, but I think that was helpful. And the second thing, I think, was, and I've alluded to it already, how governments do feel safe with us. And you'll know it is the working mandate of an organization like the ICRC and our working methods, we are very careful to not disclose anything confidential and states know that and appreciate that. So I think that's something that we brought to the table as well. I think with us being involved and knowing that we weren't there to judge, I think that allowed for more open discussion forums than we might have experienced otherwise.

Robin Möser: Okay, so this trust and credibility ICRC enjoys is, in your opinion, a very valuable factor in bringing people together to talk.

Sarah Mabeza: And I would say it's global. I would also say that to toot our own horn a little bit, I think within the Pretoria delegation of the ICRC, we have taken, we have really focused over the last decade at least, and probably more than that, on really understanding the African context. You know, we really don't want to be seen as a Western organization, it's really important to us that we don't. And most of our staff in the Pretoria delegation, including me, are African. And so it's been very important to us to understand the African context, understand the sensitivities, understand the challenges, and to come

at it from that perspective. And I think that that also helped. So just to say, although the ICRC globally has this trusted relationship with states, I do think in our region, after many years of concerted efforts, I do think we enjoy a very open access and comfortable contact with the governments in our region. So perhaps that helped as well. I also think, this is a small thing, and it's easily forgotten, but I think mentioning it once also helped, which was just the moral authority that the ICRC has to talk on nuclear disarmament, which is the fact that Dr. Marcel Junod, you know, was the first doctor to respond after Hiroshima. And he was an ICRC health delegate. And we have his journal that he wrote of what he found. And it's horrifying. Yeah, it also just gave us something to stand on to say, you know, we've seen first-hand what happened and our efforts now are in direct response to the humanitarian suffering that we saw in Hiroshima.

Robin Möser: Okay, that is really interesting. And we touched upon the question of partners you worked with, but I would also be interested in finding out whether there were any organizations or government delegates who opposed your work and you who made it harder for you? Was there resistance to the ICRC's work and did you encounter any obstacles in that sense?

Sarah Mabeza: I think any organization like the ICRC might have faced some resistance at the global level, which is actually an opportunity for us to engage States and explain the rationale behind our positions. In southern Africa, I think my answer to you would be not so much. And that would be the reason why we did what we did. Why we mobilized the power of the African bloc, because it's an issue that most African States are relatively aligned on. When you're dealing with nuclear weapons, and a continent that never really has and never really will in all likelihood possess them, for many states we found it to be a low hanging fruit. And that's one of the reasons why I think we were successful, because we're in a region where States were aligned. Of course, there were challenges for some governments at the diplomatic level. That was outside of my coverage being based in southern Africa. So I didn't have to deal with that too much. But some of my colleagues did. And I know that that was difficult for some African states. But, again, this could be my idealism, but what we found is that when the African bloc stands together, as 50 plus states, it provides a solidarity that can trump pressure from other States. And so if we could get every African state on board with this, we could perhaps get the full block to adopt a common African position. And that's kind of what we did. I mean, we never had a formal common African position coming out of the African Union, but we had informal positions that we managed to adopt along the way. So I think my answer to your question would be not so much criticism or challenges, and that's probably why we did what we did, because we knew we were in a region where we wouldn't necessarily get that criticism.

Robin Möser: Okay, okay. And we also touched upon the issue of cooperation with think tanks and other civil society organizations and I would be interested on how you perceive academics and the scientific work that think tanks too, and what the nature of your cooperation is, and whether you find it useful what they do. Tell me more about this, please!

Sarah Mabeza: Yeah. So we did work quite a bit with UNISA, with Professor Jo-Ansie van Wyk. And she was very passionate about the topic as well. And we often included her in events that we had to bring in the academic perspective. One of the challenges that we had was that most of the academics were not focusing on just nuclear disarmament, they were focusing on very specific or technical issues. And they were maybe less working on the development of a law to ban nuclear weapons and more on the technicalities between the overlap of the CTBT and the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty, you know. So

relevant and interesting, but not necessarily exactly what were doing. But Jo-Ansie was great and we definitely worked with her quite a lot. And we still work with her.

Robin Möser: And I was wondering about possible other think tank you worked with or established connections with?

Sarah Mabeza: At the time, there was an NGO called the Ceasefire Campaign. So that was led by Kennedy Mabasa, I am not sure if it exists anymore. And we worked quite closely with him. We worked also a bit with the Center for Human Rights at the University of Pretoria, although they weren't playing a leading role on this specific topic. And IANSA that I mentioned to you through Joseph Dube. We also involved a think tank called SAIIA. And so they were involved at the beginning, they were supportive the whole time, but they weren't taking a lead role. So, you know, towards the end, I must say, in the beginning, when we started the events in 2013, it was kind of like a bring everybody in. At this stage we had to be careful though not to encourage an overlap with organizations focusing on nuclear energy. And then as we got closer and closer to adoption of a treaty we kind of whittled down to mostly government and they became our crucial stakeholders. So it was still ISS and ILPI involved in organizing the events. But our focus was really on government participation at those events. As far as I remember with ICAN, we actually only started really working with them once the Treaty had been adopted. So I've done more with them now on trying to promote ratification than I think I ever did with them before the treaty was adopted.

Robin Möser: Okay, but that leads to the next question I have: How do you view ICAN and the work they've done?

Sarah Mabeza: ICAN had a role to play, no doubt about it. They've done some great work. Last year in January 2023 the ICRC, DIRCO and ICAN co-hosted a continental meeting in Pretoria.

Robin Möser: Is that the African Regional Seminar on the Universalization of the TPNW?

Sarah Mabeza: Yes, so that sounds right. My department organized it on behalf of the ICRC, and we were organizing it together with Marthinus van Schalkwyk and his team from DIRCO as well as with Céline Nahory and her team from ICAN. So we were the three organizing it, I think it was an excellent partnership and it worked really well. ICAN were really the initiators behind that meeting, they brought most of the funding and did most of the admin and logistics, they played a very important role. At the same time, you know, I was speaking earlier about how I think within ICRC Pretoria, we have developed a strong understanding of how to work with governments in our region. Having said that, we are in the process now of organizing another meeting with ICAN. So it's going to be taking place in Ethiopia at the AU level. I'm not particularly involved, because it's the ICRC delegation in Addis that is organizing it, but it's a follow-up from last year's meeting. So it's again going to be South African government through the High Commission in Addis. And then ICAN and ICRC delegations in Addis. And it's a follow up at the AU level of last year's meeting. So we work together a lot, strategically choosing what makes sense to partner on.

Robin Möser: So it's a pragmatic relationship that could be described as cordial.

Sarah Mabeza: Yes, absolutely. Absolutely cordial. Yeah. And I know that the headquarters of ICAN talk to the ICRC headquarters, all the time, we share a lot together in terms of brainstorming and strategy. Yeah, it's definitely cordial. It's just sometimes, and perhaps it's more at the field level, we do have to

take a back step sometimes where we know the government in question might have some sensitivities about the file, in which case we have to be a bit more careful.

Robin Möser: Coming back to your work and organizing this conference in January 2023. Can you give me a wrap-up on how the preparation went and who can who was another driving force next to ICAN behind it?

Sarah Mabeza: ICAN was the driving force but ICRC was also very involved. So what we did again, as I mentioned before, I think our value was in helping to get the right people invited. To have the right people in the room it doesn't always help to send a generic invitation to a government email address, and sometimes civil society in a country doesn't necessarily have the right sway to push their governments to participate. So I think the ICRC's value was probably in saying for example, look, we know in Malawi, this guy from Ministry of Defense is very active on the file, let's invite him specifically. So I think that's some of the value that we brought. We also gave a number of presentations during the conference. DIRCO was excellent in running the actual conference, although they were also involved in the run up to the conference, particularly at the diplomatic level. During the conference, they provided the chairperson of the conference. They gave multiple presentations, they chaired sessions, chaired plenary discussions and they were involved in the drafting of the outcome, which was a Chair's Summary. And that's crucial, because often governments in the room want to see that a conference is being led by another government that they respect, not necessarily by civil society, I think. So ICAN was probably a bit less front and centre during the actual week.

Robin Möser: Okay, okay. And the ICRC as well?

Sarah Mabeza: Yes, I would say so. We were happy to let DIRCO run with it, because that's where a lot of the value came from. And I think that was also something that wasn't just in this January conference last year. But this whole process I was talking to you about from 2013 to 2017, where we organized all these events. And I think that what we often tried to do was not be at the forefront, but always put either DIRCO at the forefront or the African Union or the African Commission on Nuclear Energy (AFCONE). So AFCONE doesn't necessarily focus on disarmament, but because they're an African owned entity based in South Africa, it was very important that AFCONE was involved in everything that we did from start to finish. So we included them in most events. And, you know, they would often give a high-level opening address or something like that. Because the Pelindaba Treaty is also one of the reasons why we knew we had an open door in Africa to focus on this file. So it was really important to include AFCONE. And so this idea of putting ourselves in the back and putting other people in the forefront was probably a trend that we can see from when we started until even now.

Robin Möser: Okay, I see. And then I wanted to know the following: Do you think that the debate about global nuclear disarmament includes a recognition of the gendered impact of nukes?

Sarah Mabeza: Maybe not as much as other files. For example, I've seen it a lot more when we've been talking about the Arms Trade Treaty than when we've been talking about the TPNW. But that's not something I know too much on.

Robin Möser: And do you think that when looking at the global campaign for the TPNW, do you feel that voices like the ICRC or other think tanks, other NGOs and civil society organizations, were they represented in ICAN decisions concerning the strategy on the TPNW to get it through? Did ICAN take into consideration other perspectives than their own?

Sarah Mabeza: In my own experience as a partner with ICAN, yes. It was definitely a win-win situation when we worked together. Whenever we have had a suggestion or thought to share with ICAN they were absolutely open, especially when we had insight into government perspectives that they might not have had. And vice versa. You really could share those. They were very open to listening to them.

Robin Möser: Thank you. I would like to know now, how you define impact in the field and if you can give a concrete example when the ICRC achieved an impact?

Sarah Mabeza: I mean, I think that 2010 statement that I mentioned. Yeah, yeah. I think that's a perfect example. Because it was, I think it was one of the first times that the ICRC president ever spoke so clearly on nuclear disarmament. And I have heard from a number of people, both from governments and civil society, that it is that statement that encouraged the humanitarian dialogue to begin. In my opinion, the Humanitarian Initiative was absolutely crucial. There's been some criticism, I think because certain states didn't go to Vienna or didn't go to Mexico or didn't go to Oslo, but if you look at the list of participants, there were some states in the room that were very interesting. There were three Humanitarian Initiative conferences. The first one was in Oslo, the second one was in Mexico, and the third one was in Vienna. Those for me are totally underrated. Those three conferences were crucial. Because without the momentum that was gained through those three conferences, I don't think non-nuclear weapon possessing states would have felt comfortable engaging on this topic. But through those three conferences, through those international conferences, where you did have some interesting states participating, without those three conferences, building momentum over the three years, I don't think that we would have had such an open door with states where they would have felt strong enough and powerful enough to stand up together to the P5. And I think the Humanitarian Initiative conferences gave them that footing. And the Humanitarian Initiative conferences might not have happened, at least not when they did, without Jacob Kellenberger's 2010 statement, I think it's all linked. And it's certainly the humanitarian initiative conferences which also gave the ICRC an open door to get involved on this file, because it focused obviously on the humanitarian perspective. It's also interesting to note that at one stage South Africa did express some interest in hosting one of the Conferences, although in my understanding this was no longer necessary in the end, but that's how willing and engaged and supportive South Africa was of the process. So yeah, I would say that one thing led to another led to another in this whole TPNW process, and what was so vital throughout the process was giving non-nuclear weapon possessing states comfort, that they could stand up on this topic. And that happened through a number of ways, as I mentioned, through those conferences, but also through ICAN being so vocal globally. And the shift in dialogue, from a security to humanitarian perspective, also immediately put the pressure on States that didn't want to be involved in this process. We haven't, it sounds obvious and simple, but we haven't seen that necessarily in the way that other international disarmament treaties have been adopted.

Robin Möser: Yeah. Okay. Thank you. And related to the impact question, how would you then define success in the field? And can you also give me an example of success where ICRC achieved success?

Sarah Mabeza: Yeah, I mean, for me, adoption of the Treaty, number one. We actually hosted a Commonwealth conference four weeks ago now in Pretoria. So it was a conference for all Commonwealth governments on IHL. And this is just an anecdote for you. In the opening session, the chair asked everyone if they could share one moment in their career, one highlight from their whole career related to IHL that they'll never forget. And for me, it was actually the adoption of the TPNW,

and I know the ICRC didn't do it, but I know we played a role in it. And it's not always a role that will be published or spoken about, because a lot of what we did was behind the scenes, but for me, just the fact that we got the Treaty, as everyone knows who's worked on this file, is huge. The ICRC's focus is now on ratification. I think the last time I checked, I think there were only 16 African states who had ratified. And that is, of course, a problem given that all African states were behind the adoption of the Treaty. But in the work that I do with states, because I still work with them on a day-to-day basis on ratification of the treaty, and at least in my region, the states that have not yet ratified it is not because of a lack of political will. It's the usual reasons, you know, lack of capacity, competing priorities, bureaucratic delays, those are the only reasons I genuinely believe for most, at least in my region, why the ratification hasn't happened yet. So I think we have a long road ahead of us. So we can't really perhaps say that we have achieved full success yet but at the same time I don't think we should underestimate the success of just the Treaty being adopted. And I would proudly acknowledge the role that ICRC played in the adoption of the treaty, albeit mostly behind the scenes,

Robin Möser: Okay, good. Yeah, thank you so much. We reached the last question.

Sarah Mabeza: Can I quickly tell you one more thing? I just wanted to mention another thing that I thought we did really well. But it wasn't just the ICRC, it was together with ILPI and ISS. In one of the meetings that we held in Addis Ababa, we wanted to get a common African position. I don't know how much you know about the working of the AU, but to have an official common African position adopted through the AU is a lengthy process. And so we came up with what I think was quite a novel and creative idea, which was to adopt in the room a number of "common paragraphs".

Robin Möser: That's step by step?

Sarah Mabeza: Yeah. States were about to go to an international conference and they were about to make public statements on the need for the TPNW. And so what we did in the room, and we shared it as a document afterwards with participants, was to agree on exact paragraphs that every state in the room would include in their public statements at the conference that they were going to. And so that was extremely powerful. It wasn't as powerful as getting a common position from the AU. But it was powerful because you had African state after African state after African state standing up in plenary in this international conference saying the exact same thing. And I think that's the next best thing after getting an official, common African position. And I think that was quite powerful.

Robin Möser: Okay, okay. Yeah. That is interesting. Coming to the last question. I want to know what are your expectations for the future of the nuclear-nonproliferation and disarmament field and where do you expect the field to develop to in the next, 5, 10 or even 50 years?

Sarah Mabeza: Gosh, that is a difficult question. In my personal capacity I think that because of how polarized the global community is at the moment, I think the TPNW is one of those miracle treaties that no one ever thought we'd get but we got and now we have to cling on to it with everything we can. So I think we need to hold on to the miracle that is the TPNW. I think that ICAN is crucial for the future of the TPNW. Because, you know, for many states, they're taking a backseat nowadays, like, well, we got the Treaty and now we're done. Whereas ICAN is the one who's going to keep it on people's agenda. ICAN is keeping it on the global agenda. And that's crucial. Improving the ratifications on the TPNW is crucial and as you know, that takes time. Personally, I stand in hope concerning many of the other possible avenues for working on the file...

Robin Möser: Does that include the NPT?

Sarah Mabeza: Yeah, and I think I would call it the failure of the last 2 NPT Review that actually helped in the adoption of the TPNW because it frustrated so many states, and it almost gave them an impetus to act. So yeah, I think personally that the NPT process is dragging, because of the current political situation that we're in. So my message and my hope is to cling to what we've got. Let's cling to the TPNW, let's push the TPNW, and let's increase the number of ratifications. Let's keep it on the table. Let's keep it on the agenda. Let's keep it being mentioned in UN General Assembly resolutions. And let's hope.

Robin Möser: Okay. And where do you think the focus of the civil society should lie in all this?

Sarah Mabeza: Yeah. I think, you know, the world is very quick to forget things. And I think that one of the most important roles of civil society is to be a reminder, to be a reminder of the horrors of Hiroshima. Maybe we need that reminder now more than ever, it should be a reminder of what we have achieved. A lot of people now have already forgotten about what was agreed to in the TPNW, what was it seven years ago? And, you know, they're speaking as if we're doomed, we're going into nuclear war. Instead, let's be reminded of what we agreed on, let's be reminded of what we don't want to happen again. And let's also be reminded of the discussions that happened within the Humanitarian Initiative conferences, where they brought together physicians, scientists, food security experts, to talk in very practical details about what the world would look like if we had a nuclear detonation. And so maybe the role of civil society is to be that reminder.

Robin Möser: Okay, okay. No, I think that concludes a wonderful interview. Do you have anything to add or a question for me?

Sarah Mabeza: Maybe there's just one thing I think I didn't mention. I think why there was some success from the ICRC perspective, is that what we did manage to do with this file as well, is to mirror what we were doing in Africa, at the New York level. So we have a delegation in New York, that is our delegation to the UN. So what we managed to do is, whenever we had a meeting of African experts in Pretoria, we would share the outcomes with our New York delegation. And they would then go and meet the Permanent Representatives in New York of those African countries and follow up at that level too. So it helps, because I'm sure you are aware of the problem with what happens in capitals is not always translated to the Geneva, New York or Addis Ababa level. And those are where the decisions are made. So that was also just something I wanted to highlight. I think that was quite important. And also, for some of the meetings that we had, we would often bring African experts from capital to our events. But sometimes we also brought them from New York, where we could see that there was a representative from a permanent mission who was very active and interested. And one of the things I might say to end off is, in my job generally, in the Pretoria delegation, we have been quite passionate about identifying what we call individual champions, so states in the region, but also people, individuals in the region, who see themselves as champions. So that also translated into the efforts we did with the TPNW; we tried to find champions on the African continent. Wherever we could highlight a champion, whether it be a state or an individual, we did that and we repetitively invited them to our events and kept in touch with them. And that helped us a lot as well.

Robin Möser: Yeah, thank you. This was a lot but very interesting. Let me stop the recording now.