ON OCTOBER 24, 2020, THE TREATY ON THE PROHIBITION of Nuclear Weapons received its fiftieth state ratification, achieving the number necessary for the treaty to enter into force on January 22, 2021. October 24, 2020, also marked the seventy-fifth anniversary of the creation of the United Nations, when the original fifty-one members ratified the UN Charter, and came seventy-five years after two atomic bombs were dropped on Japan in August 1945.

In this book, we analyze the humanitarian disarmament initiative that culminated in the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons by 122 members of the UN General Assembly in July 2017. Through academic research and interviews with people directly involved in the process, we trace the initiative from its first conference in Oslo in 2013 to its ratification in 2020.

To offer a comprehensive analysis of the humanitarian nuclear disarmament movement—its protagonists, its strategies, and its impact—we went beyond reports, working papers, UN documents, and academic publications. We immersed ourselves in the field by attending conferences, official UN meetings, side events, panel discussions, and book presentations. In addition, we conducted open-ended interviews with Allison Pytlak of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, one of the main nongovernmental organization partners of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons; Alexander Kmentt, one of the major architects of
the humanitarian impact initiative at the interstate level; George-Wilhelm Gallhofer, counselor at the Austrian Mission to the UN, who attended the negotiating conferences and worked on the TPNW in the First Committee of the General Assembly; Alex Giacomelli da Silva, minister plenipotentiary at the Brazilian Mission to the UN; Tsutomu Kono, senior political affairs officer in the Weapons of Mass Destruction Branch of the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA); UNODA expert Michael Spies, who supported the Open-Ended Working Group and the negotiating conferences and assisted the president of the conference in drafting the treaty text; and Veronique Christory, weapons expert at the International Committee of the Red Cross delegation to the UN, who has been part of the humanitarian impact campaign from the outset. Due to the considerable political delicacy of the issue at hand and the professional obligations of the interviewees, the notes taken during the interviews are incorporated into the book without attributing them to a specific interviewee.

We would like to thank the professionals who worked on the humanitarian initiative and the treaty process in various capacities—those already named and many others—for taking the time to engage with us and share their expertise. They granted us fascinating insights into their work, pointed us in new directions for our research, provided additional material, and shared with us their passion for a world free of nuclear weapons—a passion that has carried us through this project for the past three years.