JAN. 22, 2021 will one day be looked back as a turning point in history. On that day, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons enters into force. To mark the day, the bells at the Loreto Motherhouse in Nerinx will ring in celebration. They will join faith communities and houses of worship across the world.

In other places, banners reading “Nuclear Weapons are Illegal” will be hung at nuclear weapons production sites and military bases; protests will take place at colleges and universities that participate in weapons programs; citizens will call on corporations and financial institutions to divest themselves of support for nuclear weapons production.

The Treaty, approved in 2017 by 172 countries at the United Nations, is not a magic wand. It won’t make nuclear weapons go away. But it will place them in the same legal category as chemical weapons, biological weapons, land mines, and poison gas, all of which have been outlawed by the international community.

Today, nine nations possess more than 13,000 nuclear weapons—an all out nuclear exchange between the U.S. and Russia would kill hundreds of millions of people and destroy every major city in both countries in one afternoon. But it doesn’t take that to ruin us—even a “small” exchange between India and Pakistan would trigger “winter”—a cloud of debris circling the planet that would make growing crops impossible for at least a decade and contaminate virtually every water source we rely on. Instead, rural areas would not be spared.

That’s the existential threat of nuclear weapons—if we don’t threaten our lives.

Those nine nuclear nations say the Treaty doesn’t apply to them because they haven’t signed it. Technically, they have, but the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons enters into force on Jan. 22. All nine nations have failed to call for the abolition of nuclear weapons, declaring that they make nuclear weapons necessary. Hundreds of generals and diplomatic leaders around the world have joined our call. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons is an important step in turning those calls into action.

In the last 50 years, every U.S. President has declared nuclear weapons the single greatest security threat we face. Republican presidents—Reagan and Bush—have done more to reduce nuclear stockpiles than Democrats. But all of them realize the current situation is irrational and unsustainable. Today, according to a panel of experts at the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, the danger is greater than ever before.

The risk of an accidental launch, a computer hack, a command of fatal failure, a mistaken reading on a radar screen—these are all very real possibilities. Any one of them could trigger the end of life as we know it on our planet.

Any one of them could trigger the end of life as we know it on our planet.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons is an beacon of hope in a world that is headed for nuclear war. It is my hope that this future will be safer than any other time in human history.

Kissing, Sam Nunn, Aung San Suu Kyi, Nelson Mandela, Nelson Mandela, and we must, to make the future safe for our children.

Kissing, Sam Nunn, Aung San Suu Kyi, Nelson Mandela, and we must, to make the future safe for our children.

Kissing, Sam Nunn, Aung San Suu Kyi, Nelson Mandela, and we must, to make the future safe for our children.

Kissing, Sam Nunn, Aung San Suu Kyi, Nelson Mandela, and we must, to make the future safe for our children.

Kissing, Sam Nunn, Aung San Suu Kyi, Nelson Mandela, and we must, to make the future safe for our children.

Kissing, Sam Nunn, Aung San Suu Kyi, Nelson Mandela, and we must, to make the future safe for our children.