

Preparatory Committee for the 2026 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

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Failure by the nuclear-weapon States to progress their nuclear disarmament obligations and commitments is contributing to unprecedented levels of nuclear risk

**Working paper submitted by New Zealand on behalf of the New
Agenda Coalition (Brazil, Egypt, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand
and South Africa)***

Nuclear dangers are unprecedentedly high

1. The New Agenda Coalition remains alarmed at international developments that have brought the world closer to nuclear catastrophe. These developments include, inter alia:

- (a) Threats of nuclear weapons use, whether implicit or explicit;
- (b) Lack of compliance with, and erosion and dismantling of, treaty regimes, especially by the nuclear-weapon States;
- (c) Current conflicts involving a nuclear dimension, including in the Middle East and Europe, as well as heightened tensions in North-East and South Asia;
- (d) Qualitative and quantitative expansion of nuclear arsenals;
- (e) Nuclear modernization programmes, which suggest the intention of indefinite possession of nuclear weapons, and which raise questions of compatibility with nuclear disarmament obligations and commitments freely entered into in the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons;
- (f) Long-standing inertia towards ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty by nuclear-weapon States and recent moves to withdraw ratification, which continue to make the entry into force of the Treaty impossible, with the associated risk that nuclear testing could be resumed;
- (g) Disregard of negative security assurances freely undertaken, and an associated failure to prioritize this issue, either under relevant nuclear-weapon-free zone treaties or negotiations on a comprehensive legally binding instrument that would strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation regime;

* The New Agenda Coalition reiterates that working paper NPT/CONF.2026/PC.I/WP.5, submitted for the first session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2026 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, remains valid as a contribution for consideration during the current review cycle.



- (h) A further decrease in already low levels of transparency and accountability in nuclear disarmament;
- (i) Extended nuclear deterrence arrangements that include the forward deployment of nuclear weapons, including on the territory of non-nuclear-weapon States, which, inter alia, reduce response times and hasten nuclear decision-making on the basis of incomplete information;
- (j) Unpredictable new strategic factors, involving developments in the fields of outer space, artificial intelligence and cyberspace, which could increase the risk of use or threat of use of nuclear weapons;
- (k) The conduct of military exercises involving nuclear weapon components;
- (l) Increasing salience of nuclear weapons by the nuclear-weapon States and States under extended nuclear security guarantees in their security doctrines, policies and plans, including through new nuclear deterrence arrangements;
- (m) Persistent failure to undertake new negotiations on nuclear disarmament and related core items, including in the Conference on Disarmament;
- (n) Actions by States that directly or indirectly challenge or undermine international law, including the non-proliferation and disarmament regime, as well as the norms built over decades to enhance collective security.

Nuclear disarmament and arms control processes have stalled, adding to an already risky situation

2. For some time now, the nuclear-weapon States have not made any meaningful progress on their unequivocal undertaking to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals, as agreed by all States parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty in 2000. We recall that the Treaty was never intended to create a permanent entitlement for some to retain nuclear weapons.
3. There is an obligation on all nuclear-weapon States to pursue negotiations on nuclear disarmament. Commitments that restrict the use of nuclear weapons, such as policies of no first use, while welcome, are not a substitute for the prohibition and total elimination of nuclear weapons, and do not close the door to scenarios in which use of nuclear weapons could occur.
4. Nuclear disarmament is crucial for a safe and secure world. We do not accept the argument that the international security environment must improve before nuclear disarmament and arms control can recommence. History has proven that arms control and disarmament can be an enabler for improvements in the security environment, and that it is precisely in times of crisis that disarmament and arms control are vital.
5. Improved transparency and measurability of nuclear-weapon States' implementation of nuclear disarmament obligations and commitments would contribute to greater accountability in the Treaty and its full implementation. This would help build mutual trust among States parties.
6. States parties to the Treaty should continue addressing irreversibility and verification measures in attaining and maintaining a world free of nuclear weapons. The three principles of transparency, verifiability and irreversibility are interrelated and indispensable to effectively implementing the Treaty's nuclear disarmament obligations and commitments.

The humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons would be catastrophic

7. The risk of nuclear war has escalated in recent times. Hence, all States parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty should recognize and restate their grave concern about

the catastrophic consequences of any nuclear weapons use and redouble practical efforts to prevent such use. There is a growing body of scientific evidence showing that use of nuclear weapons would have catastrophic humanitarian consequences outside any State's capacity to respond. In addition to the immediate loss of life, these consequences transcend national borders and would include, inter alia, long-term impacts on human health and on the environment; breakdowns in the global food supply, supply chains and financial systems; and the collapse of ecosystems and critical infrastructure.

The risks of nuclear weapons use cannot simply be managed away

8. These risks exist so long as nuclear weapons exist, and any approach to try to prevent or manage such risks must fully acknowledge this reality. Any approach to try to prevent or manage nuclear risk should also acknowledge, inter alia:

(a) That claims to be able to manage nuclear risks permanently are illusory. The level of control required over the many variables that contribute to this risk simply does not exist;

(b) The fallibility of human decision-making. We rely on biases, cultural contexts and assumptions. Experts across a variety of fields have demonstrated that humans are incapable of accurately assessing probabilities across complex systems, or events with large consequences. Nuclear weapons systems are characterized by being both complex and highly consequential;

(c) A false sense of confidence in our ability to manage and respond to any nuclear weapons use. Assessments of nuclear weapons use have largely focused only on first- or single-use cases and failed to take into account the risk of escalation or additional use. The full spectrum of nuclear risks and the catastrophic humanitarian consequences that would almost certainly follow any nuclear weapons use must be fully considered;

(d) The fallibility of early warning and nuclear command and control, as demonstrated by the many documented cases of false alarms of an impending nuclear attack;

(e) The existing complexity of interacting systems involved in nuclear decision-making;

(f) Risks of misunderstanding, as illustrated by the many occasions on which nuclear-weapon States have misread each other's intentions and entered into an escalation spiral, in some cases only narrowly avoiding a nuclear exchange;

(g) Accident causation theory, which argues that complex systems are bound to suffer both major and minor accidents over time, by their very nature;

(h) The multiple recorded nuclear safety incidents documented across the history of nuclear weapons;

(i) The development of other strategic capabilities involving new and emerging technologies, including in outer space, in cyberspace and in the area of artificial intelligence, which could increase nuclear risks in unexpected ways because of the additional complexity these introduce into deterrence calculations;

(j) The reality that the concept of nuclear deterrence is unprovable, and is based on a complex interaction of scientific, technological and sociopolitical assumptions;

(k) That deterrence is posited on the very existence of nuclear risk, which incentivizes downplaying the consequences of nuclear weapons use, including by claiming that the catastrophic reality of those consequences is a constraining factor on the risk of use, thus posing a circular argument.

Nuclear risk reduction considerations have a role but are no substitute for necessary nuclear disarmament measures

9. We strongly reject attempts to create a distinction between so-called “responsible” and “irresponsible” nuclear weapons possession or behaviour. Nuclear deterrence always rests upon the threat of use of nuclear weapons. The only responsible option is to reduce reliance on nuclear weapons and achieve their total and complete elimination without delay.

10. Faced with grave nuclear dangers, there is an urgent need for concrete measures to lower the risk of nuclear weapons use and contribute to the prevention of nuclear war. All States that rely on nuclear weapons for their security should take immediate action in this vein. With a view to total elimination of nuclear weapons, States need to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in their security doctrines, policies and plans without prejudice to the need to immediately accelerate the implementation of all relevant nuclear disarmament obligations and commitments.

11. Measures to reduce the risk of nuclear weapons use with a view to creating greater stability will not in themselves eliminate that underlying risk. Such an approach is not credible and simply cannot work in perpetuity. Completely removing the risks associated with nuclear weapons requires their total, irreversible and verifiable elimination.

Recommendations

12. We recommend that States parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty consider adopting the following measures to accelerate concrete progress towards nuclear disarmament, as contributions to the 2023–2026 review cycle:

(a) Reaffirm the absolute validity of existing Treaty obligations and commitments and recommit to their fulfilment without delay. Principal among these is an unequivocal undertaking by the nuclear-weapon States to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals.¹ The need is greater than ever for the nuclear-weapon States to commit to multilateral negotiations to achieve nuclear disarmament. We are convinced that the act of negotiation could rebuild trust among States, which is desperately needed;

(b) States should continue to condemn all nuclear threats, whether implicit or explicit, as illegitimate, inadmissible and dangerous. All such nuclear rhetoric and threats are irresponsible and deplorable;

(c) Urge all non-nuclear-weapon States that host nuclear weapons on their territory to acknowledge the elevated levels of risk involved with such arrangements and seek to put an end to them;

(d) Call on the Russian Federation and the United States of America, which still maintain nuclear weapons on high alert, to mutually agree to remove them from this status with immediate effect;

(e) Urge the nuclear-weapon States – where possible – to firewall discussions on nuclear disarmament and arms control from other issues in their bilateral and multilateral relationships, in view of the importance and urgency of achieving positive steps to reduce current levels of nuclear danger, and reflecting the importance attached to these issues during times of crisis;

(f) Call on all States to clearly and publicly acknowledge the catastrophic consequences of any nuclear weapons use and contribute to further advancing this area of study through supporting new scientific research, and engaging on technical

¹ See [NPT/CONF.2000/28 \(Parts I and II\)](#).

aspects of this work. Scientific studies on the consequences of nuclear weapons use are not only the purview of nuclear-weapon States, given the transboundary and intergenerational effects of any nuclear detonations;

(g) As a practical transparency measure and to contribute to our understanding about the full risks associated with nuclear weapons, we call on nuclear-weapon States to declassify historical information, including any instances of “close calls”;

(h) Pending the total elimination of nuclear weapons, we urge States to agree on strengthened guardrails and exercise maximum restraint, to reduce current levels of nuclear danger. This could include the following measures:

(i) High-level political statements of nuclear restraint, including on the inadmissibility of any nuclear weapons use, building on the joint statement by the nuclear-weapon States of January 2022² and the Leaders’ Declaration of the Group of 20 of November 2022;³

(ii) Nuclear-weapon States make assurances that nuclear weapons will not be used, or their use threatened, against States that do not have such weapons, under any circumstances;

(iii) Doctrinal restraint, for example, “no first use” policies, explicitly defensive-only postures, and commitments to de-target and de-alert nuclear weapons. These steps do not substitute for, but rather complement, concrete nuclear disarmament steps and function as important confidence-building measures;

(iv) To commit to refrain from the qualitative and quantitative build-up of nuclear arsenals;

(v) The Russian Federation and the United States, as the States with the largest nuclear arsenals, re-engage on New START and resume negotiations towards a new arms control framework that achieves deeper reductions in their deployed and stored nuclear arsenals. This would be an important confidence-building measure and would contribute to the fulfilment of obligations and commitments under the Treaty;

(vi) All States refrain from actions that may weaken the disarmament and non-proliferation architecture, or undermine key norms;

(vii) All States that have not yet joined the Treaty do so as non-nuclear weapon States, without delay or precondition;

(viii) Nuclear-weapon States set out clear, transparent and measurable plans with defined timelines for how they will fulfil their disarmament obligations and commitments, including through the submission of standardized implementation reports for discussion and review at the formal sessions of the Treaty review cycle;

(ix) For all States to respect existing legal obligations and related commitments regarding nuclear weapons, whether they stem from the Non-Proliferation Treaty or other related Treaty regimes, such as the Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies, and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

² Joint statement of the leaders of the five nuclear-weapon States on preventing nuclear war and avoiding arms races of 3 January 2022.

³ Leaders’ declaration of the Summit of the Group of 20, held in Bali, Indonesia, on 15 and 16 November 2022.