

STEPPING BACK FROM THE NUCLEAR PRECIPICE: URGENT ACTIONS IN PURSUIT OF A WORLD WITHOUT NUCLEAR WEAPONS

International Group of Eminent Persons for a World without Nuclear Weapons (IGEP)

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The danger of nuclear war looms larger than it has in decades. Rising geopolitical tensions, resurgent nuclear salience, and the advent of emerging technologies have brought us closer to the precipice, threatening to plunge the world into a perilous era of unrestrained arms races, with consequences extending beyond nuclear rearmament. Most alarming is the growing risk that an escalating conventional conflict could push us over the edge into nuclear use. It is time for us to face the fact that the consequences could be catastrophic and to take urgent action to prevent nuclear war.

Too often, nuclear weapons are discussed in abstract terms, with insufficient attention given to nuclear dangers. The *Hibakusha* have worked to correct this for several decades, highlighting the appalling inhumanity of the 1945 nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Nearly eighty years later, we owe it to the *Hibakusha* and to ourselves to acknowledge the devastating impact that escalating war could have using today's weapons in our interconnected world; we must make every effort to avert the danger of such a war and to take measures to safeguard the security of peoples, and thus ensure that Nagasaki is the last place to experience nuclear devastation.

The 2026 Review Conference (RevCon) of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) provides a crucial opportunity for us to come together to take a collective step back from the nuclear precipice. Working for a positive RevCon outcome is vital following the failure to achieve consensus outcomes in 2015 and 2022. We must use this precious chance to reaffirm the core principles that underpin the NPT, which remains the strongest international bulwark against nuclear disaster. We must also use it as an opportunity to adopt bold, actionable measures to prevent nuclear war and pursue a world without nuclear weapons.

CORE PRINCIPLES

Respecting the following core principles will help us chart a safer course and a path toward a world without nuclear weapons:

1. All states have an obligation to comply with the United Nations (UN) Charter in its entirety, including by not committing acts of aggression and by renouncing the use of force for the acquisition of territory.
2. All states must comply with applicable international law including international humanitarian law at all times.
3. All states bear responsibility to work for a world without nuclear weapons, but the states with the biggest responsibility to lead are the states that possess nuclear weapons.
4. All states must foster a culture of dialogue and cooperation to uphold and reinforce the multilateral non-proliferation regime, with the NPT at its centre. They also should work together to ensure that it is agile in responding to emerging challenges and opportunities, including those related to technological innovation.

5. All states must keep working to move away from dependence on nuclear weapons. Nuclear deterrence has not proven to be, nor should it be, the final form of security.

The core principles set out above are currently being disregarded by some states, with grave and worsening consequences. All states must reassert these principles and demonstrate their adherence to them.

URGENT STEPS

To address this dangerous situation and underpin our collective efforts to pursue a world without nuclear weapons, states must take urgent steps to 1) prevent war and hence nuclear use, 2) stop nuclear arms racing and reduce proliferation risks, and 3) ensure a constructive outcome from the 2026 NPT RevCon.

1) Prevent nuclear war

Nuclear-armed states have a primary responsibility to prevent nuclear use. We, the IGEP, call on them to take the following urgent steps to reduce the risk of nuclear war:

- i. Take measures to avoid direct military confrontation and prioritize nuclear restraint, including by not making explicit and implicit nuclear threats.
- ii. Engage in sustained strategic dialogues to address mutual security concerns and avoid misperception leading to conflict and conflict escalation.
- iii. Prioritize crisis prevention.
- iv. Uphold moratorium on explosive nuclear testing.
- v. Ensure effective human oversight in all decisions related to nuclear weapons.
- vi. Refrain from cyber-attacks against nuclear facilities and command-and-control networks.
- vii. Provide pre-launch notifications on missile and space vehicle launches.

All states that do not possess nuclear weapons can and should help reduce the risk of nuclear war. They must:

- viii. Urge the nuclear-armed states to take the urgent steps outlined above.
- ix. Fully implement the Hague Code of Conduct (HCOC), including via pre-launch notifications.
- x. Explore, with nuclear-armed states, measures that would reduce nuclear salience and increase confidence in no-first use, negative security assurances, and other declaratory commitments.

All states must:

- xi. Avoid taking military action that would cause radioactive release.

2) Stop nuclear arms racing and reduce proliferation risks

Progress toward a world without nuclear weapons is being undermined by renewed nuclear arms racing and proliferation dynamics. All states have a responsibility to address these dynamics, in

line with the core principles. We call on states to implement the following steps to reduce nuclear salience and demonstrate a shared commitment to pursue a world without nuclear weapons:

- i. Russia and the United States engage in strategic dialogue and keep New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) limits while negotiating a follow-on framework for arms control.
- ii. China, France and the United Kingdom engage in discussion on their respective conceptions of minimum deterrence, as a contribution to arms control.
- iii. Nuclear-weapon states reinvigorate the P5 process to explore new forms of arms control and invite all other nuclear-armed states to participate.
- iv. Nuclear-armed states improve nuclear transparency to reduce mistrust, including by sharing information on nuclear arsenals, doctrines, postures, and future development plans.
- v. Nuclear-armed states engage with each other to discuss ways to reduce the risks associated with military use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), in particular as applied to nuclear command, control and communications (NC3), including voluntarily sharing risk assessments and best practices of risk management.
- vi. All states engage in and sustain dialogues on threat perceptions and security concerns.
- vii. All states strengthen measures against the proliferation of nuclear weapons and their delivery systems by any state or non-state actor.
- viii. All states engage in diplomatic efforts to address proliferation concerns in the Middle East.
- ix. All stakeholders engage in diplomatic efforts to address concerns associated with the Iranian nuclear programs, bearing in mind that the principle of restraint in the use of force to resolve issues must be maintained and that once an agreement is reached, all stakeholders should implement it in good faith.
- x. All stakeholders promote and facilitate engagement on the Korean peninsula aimed at mutual reassurance of non-aggression and the establishment of a multilateral dialogue on regional security, while launching a diplomatic effort to reduce nuclear risks in the region, leading to denuclearization.
- xi. All states work to bridge deterrence and disarmament perspectives, including those of states parties to the NPT and to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), by engaging widely in discussion in relevant international forums on deterrence assumptions, the consistency of nuclear policies with international humanitarian law, effects of nuclear war, and on alternative measures to maintain security that can lead to nuclear disarmament.
- xii. All states support and promote initiatives that raise awareness among leaders and publics about nuclear dangers, including the risk of proliferation and profound consequences of nuclear use.
- xiii. All states encourage visits of leaders, youth, and others to Hiroshima and Nagasaki to better comprehend the effects of nuclear use.

3) Work for a constructive 2026 NPT Review Conference

The nuclear non-proliferation regime must be preserved and strengthened to enhance international peace and security, reduce nuclear dangers, and facilitate movement toward a world without nuclear weapons. States must work together to ensure a constructive 2026 NPT Review Conference. We call on states parties to incorporate the following commitments into the 2026 Final Document and to work to achieve a consensus outcome:

- i. Commit to achieve a world without nuclear weapons, recalling the first UN General Assembly resolution and consensus outcome documents adopted at past NPT Review Conferences, including the 2010 Action Plan.
- ii. Uphold the moratorium on nuclear explosive testing and work harder to achieve entry into force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), and encourage nuclear weapon states to voluntarily provide unilateral or reciprocal transparency at their nuclear testing sites.
- iii. Agree to a moratorium on producing fissile material for nuclear weapons, and hold high-level meetings to underscore the urgency of concluding a Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty (FMCT).
- iv. Strengthen NPT accountability by submitting more detailed national reports during the 2030 NPT review cycle to help build confidence through increasing the transparency of nuclear arsenals, doctrines and postures, and clarifying steps taken to reduce nuclear weapons stockpiles.
- v. Agree to submit five-year, forward-looking national action plans outlining steps for fulfilling NPT obligations and commitments including concrete steps/measures toward nuclear disarmament, and general and complete disarmament.
- vi. Work to raise awareness of the effects of nuclear war, including by discussing the findings of the study requested by UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/79/238 ('Nuclear war effects and scientific research'), and highlight harms to the environment and public health of peoples and nations not involved in the conflict.
- vii. Encourage all states to invest in nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation education.
- viii. Respect the status of Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones (NWFZs) and strengthen them by signing and ratifying the relevant protocols.
- ix. Work together to address gaps in the non-proliferation regime to improve its agility to address challenges and opportunities associated with emerging technologies.

CONCLUSION

Nuclear dangers are accelerating with alarming speed—demanding not only sober reflection, but bold, coordinated action. The enduring message of the *Hibakusha*—and the recent awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to *Nihon Hidankyo* (Japan Confederation of A- and H-Bomb Sufferers Organizations)—remind us of the humanitarian imperative and moral urgency to achieve a world without nuclear weapons. This recognition is not only tributes to the past but urgent an urgent call to the present. As we approach the 2026 NPT Review Conference, the international community has a pivotal opportunity to step back from the nuclear precipice, reaffirm shared principles, and take concrete, cooperative measures to reduce nuclear dangers, enhance security and revitalize disarmament commitments. It is the earnest hope of all members of the IGEP that this document will serve as a constructive contribution toward inspiring renewed commitment, fostering dialogue, and guiding collective progress on the long and challenging path to a world free of nuclear weapons.