

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

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### Reducing the risk of nuclear conflict

**Working paper submitted by Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Kazakhstan, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America**

1. We express our deep concern that the risk of nuclear conflict is higher today than at any time since the height of the cold war. Taking concrete and meaningful steps to reduce the risk of nuclear conflict – risk reduction – is a matter of urgency. Significant stress on the disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation architecture, a lack of dialogue and transparency, in particular by some States, and rapid developments in the area of emerging and disruptive technologies may further impact the risk of nuclear conflict. We recognize that the elimination of all nuclear weapons is the only absolute guarantee against their use. We deplore that, in the current deteriorating security environment, the gap between the goal of a nuclear-weapon free world and the reality has become wider, not narrower.
2. All States have an interest in and can contribute to reducing the risk of nuclear conflict, while nuclear-weapon States bear a special responsibility in this area. The imperative of risk reduction is recognized in the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Its preamble text begins as follows: “Considering the devastation that would be visited upon all mankind by a nuclear war and the consequent need ... to avert the danger of such a war and to take measures to safeguard the security of peoples”. Risk reduction is neither a substitute nor a prerequisite for nuclear disarmament. It can and should contribute to forward movement in and complement the implementation of article VI obligations and nuclear disarmament-related commitments.
3. Risk reduction has been practiced for decades, including during the cold war by the Soviet Union and the United States. Reducing risks of nuclear conflict has been considered extensively in relevant forums and initiatives for nuclear disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation. This includes the Conference on Disarmament, the First Committee of the General Assembly, the Disarmament Commission and the Non-Proliferation Treaty review process. In addition, it has been discussed in the meetings of the five nuclear-weapon States and various cross-regional initiatives,



such as the Stockholm Initiative on Nuclear Disarmament and the Creating an Environment for Nuclear Disarmament initiative.

4. Existing work strands have identified a considerable number of risk reduction proposals,<sup>1</sup> including reaffirming risk reduction principles; increasing understanding and awareness of risks; operationalizing past proposals, including at the political, strategic, operational and technical levels; and addressing the role of emerging and disruptive technologies. While there remains a need to foster a convergence of views on risk reduction, we recognize that States are free to and should develop and implement geographically and contextually appropriate risk reduction measures. More meaningful dialogue on reducing risks would facilitate the formulation of actions for all States Parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, in particular the nuclear-weapon States, to take forward and report on concrete progress beyond the current review cycle. Increasing and accelerating effective implementation of these options and measures to reduce the risk of nuclear conflict remains vital.

5. While working towards consensus on the subject of risk reduction, States could look to reaffirm recent expressions of support for reducing the risk of nuclear conflict, for instance the January 2022 Joint Statement of the Leaders of the Five Nuclear-Weapon States on Preventing Nuclear War and Avoiding Arms Races, or the joint statement on reducing the risk of nuclear conflict by a group of States at the second Preparatory Committee for the Non-Proliferation Treaty. In addition, there would be value in expanding engagement in risk reduction in regional and subregional settings, as in the 2024 Western Hemisphere Risk Reduction Workshop (organized in partnership with the Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean), the Asia Pacific Workshops, the Regional Forum Nuclear Risk Reduction Workshop of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 2023, and the meetings on reducing the risk of nuclear conflict, held in Stockholm in May 2024, in Geneva in July 2024, in New York in October 2024 and in Geneva in March 2025. We urge that participation in such efforts be as inclusive as possible.

6. The 2026 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons should strengthen and reaffirm shared commitment and political will to implement concrete risk reduction measures. To this end, the Review Conference should agree on concrete language, including on practical measures, in line with the following considerations:

(a) The Review Conference should reaffirm that the elimination of all nuclear weapons is the only absolute guarantee against their use and that the only way to totally eliminate all risk of nuclear conflict is through complete, verifiable, irreversible, global nuclear disarmament;

(b) The Review Conference should recommit to the goal of the total elimination of nuclear weapons. The Review Conference should recognize that, while the final objective of the efforts of all States should continue to be general and complete disarmament under effective international control, the immediate goal is elimination of the danger of a nuclear war and implementation of measures to avoid an arms race and clear the path towards lasting peace;

(c) The Review Conference should reaffirm that measures reducing the risk of nuclear conflict are neither a substitute nor a prerequisite for nuclear disarmament.

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<sup>1</sup> See the working papers, inter alia, of the Stockholm Initiative on Nuclear Disarmament, the New Agenda Coalition, the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative, the five nuclear-weapon States and the United States of America on the topic presented at the tenth Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, as well as the joint statement on reducing the risk of nuclear conflict of the second Preparatory Committee for the Non-Proliferation Treaty, 2024.

On the contrary, pending the elimination of nuclear weapons, risk reduction goes hand in hand with the need to realize article VI goals and contributes to our enduring interest in the prevention of nuclear war. Preventing the risk of nuclear conflict and arms races and promoting further progress in nuclear disarmament are primary objectives;

(d) Considering the increased risk of nuclear conflict, the devastation that would be visited upon all humankind by a nuclear war and the humanitarian consequences that would result thereof, the Review Conference should recognize that reducing the risk of nuclear conflict and preventing nuclear war is a shared interest, with the special responsibility of nuclear-weapon States in this regard. The Review Conference should stress the consequent need for all States to make every effort to avert the danger of nuclear war and to take measures to safeguard the security and safety of peoples. It is also imperative for all States at all times to comply with applicable international law, including international humanitarian law;

(e) The Review Conference should appeal to the nuclear-weapon States to take all necessary measures to reduce the risk of nuclear war, to refrain from inflammatory rhetoric concerning the use of nuclear weapons, and to promptly identify, explore and implement effective unilateral, bilateral and multilateral risk reduction measures, including by engaging in existing and new arms control agreements and measures and implementing article VI obligations and nuclear disarmament-related commitments;

(f) In this context, while taking forward the implementation of existing commitments, including the unequivocal undertaking by nuclear-weapon States to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals, leading to nuclear disarmament, and pursuing concrete progress on the steps leading to nuclear disarmament, as stipulated in action 5 of the 2010 action plan, the Review Conference should propose that all States, and especially nuclear-weapon States, should commit to address risks arising from miscalculation, misperception, miscommunication or accident through, inter alia, the following:

- (i) Pending the total elimination of nuclear weapons, making every effort to reduce the risk of nuclear conflict and to achieve a safer world with undiminished security for all and to achieve peace and security, in accordance with the objectives of the Treaty;
- (ii) In line with efforts to reduce the risk of nuclear conflict, stress the importance of negative security assurances given by the nuclear-weapon States, reaffirm the commitment to establish further nuclear-weapon-free zones, where appropriate, on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at among States in the region concerned, and encourage all concerned States to ratify the nuclear-weapon-free zone treaties and their relevant protocols;
- (iii) Intensifying regular dialogue among and between the nuclear-weapon States and with the non-nuclear-weapon States on policies and measures to reduce the risk of nuclear conflict. This includes, inter alia, ways to enhance trust among States, as well as the role of nuclear restraint, addressing different threat and risk perceptions, and steps to enhance predictability;
- (iv) Exploring and implementing effective crisis prevention and management tools and mechanisms, including transparency and confidence-building measures, notification and data exchange arrangements, enhanced leader-to-leader and military-to-military contact, and the establishment and maintenance of crisis-proof communication lines;

- (v) Maintaining the de-targeted status of nuclear forces, and taking all possible steps towards enhancing procedures and policies that would increase time for decision-making and could allow for de-escalation of crises;
  - (vi) Better understanding and identifying vulnerabilities and opportunities related to potentially disruptive new technologies, including through an inclusive dialogue recognizing that non-nuclear-weapon States also play an important role in this area.
  - (g) The Review Conference should recommend that States, especially nuclear-weapon States, continue consideration and report on actions taken to reduce risks in their future national reports during the next review cycle.
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