



The 2020 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference was scheduled to meet April 27 – May 22, 2020, the 50th anniversary of the Treaty’s entry-into-force, at United Nations headquarters in New York. Due to public health concerns related to the global pandemic of COVID-19, the Conference was postponed to a later date, as soon as the circumstances permit, tentatively in January 2021.

In light of the U.S. withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty and the Open Skies Treaty, its abrogation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (the Iran deal) and the deteriorating international situation, this Review Conference is considered critical to the credibility of the NPT regime and to prospects for future nuclear arms control and disarmament measures. As we have done since 1994, Western States Legal Foundation (WSLF) had planned to have a delegation at the NPT conference to observe, to organize and participate in educational events and conferences, and to make a presentation to the assembled governments during the designated civil society session.

All of these plans had to be dramatically altered after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Non-governmental organizations decided to submit a joint statement from civil society to the States Parties to the NPT and WSLF was invited to join the drafting committee. This statement was drafted by Ray Acheson (WILPF); **John Burroughs (Lawyers Committee on Nuclear Policy and WSLF Board member)**; **Jacqueline Cabasso (Western States Legal Foundation)**; Akira Kawasaki (Peace Boat); Daryl Kimball (Arms Control Association); Allison Pytlak (WILPF); Alicia Sanders-Zakre (ICAN); Susi Snyder (PAX); and Carlos Umana (IPPNW). It was signed by 90 organizations.

Joint Statement from Civil Society to the States Parties of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

11 May 2020

As the world mobilises in response to the deadly COVID-19 pandemic, we cannot afford to lose sight of the other global challenges that threaten all of us, including the worsening planetary climate emergency and the ongoing threat of catastrophic nuclear war. These are all, in the words of former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, “problems without passports”.

The scale of the global crisis caused by this pandemic is due to multiple political failures. Time and again, governments and other actors have ignored and dismissed the warnings made by scientists throughout the world about transnational threats and the steps necessary to prevent and/or mitigate the effects. In the case of COVID-19, those warnings were ignored for too long and now it is too late. We’re not only at a pivotal point in the struggle against the fast-moving coronavirus; we are also at a tipping point in the long-running effort to reduce the threat of nuclear war and eliminate nuclear weapons.

Tensions between the world’s nuclear-armed states are rising; the risk of nuclear use is growing; billions of dollars are being spent to replace and upgrade nuclear weapons; and key agreements that have kept nuclear competition in check are in serious jeopardy.

One of the many lessons to be learned from this global crisis is that science must not be ignored under the guise of “national security” policies that put profit before people and privilege the most powerful.

As we approach the solemn 75th anniversary of the atomic bombings by the United States of the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and mark the 25th anniversary of the package of decisions that led to the indefinite extension of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), we are also facing postponement of the 2020 NPT Review Conference. It is in this context that the civil society organisations endorsing this statement put forward the following three key messages to NPT states parties:

1. Global support for the NPT is strong, but its long-term viability cannot be taken for granted.

It is encouraging to see that all countries have expressed support for the NPT, including in recent UN Security Council meetings. However, the Treaty is only as strong as its implementation. The longer that consensus-based NPT Review Conference decisions remain unimplemented, the less weight the Treaty and its obligations will have. For the long-term viability of the NPT, all countries must fully implement their obligations. The body of previous NPT Review Conference commitments and action steps still apply. This includes the benchmarks agreed to at the historic 1995 Review and Extension Conference and further commitments made at the 2000 and 2010 Review Conferences. These remain largely unfulfilled, and some are at risk of being reversed or lost entirely, such as the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty.

2. The grave state of global affairs and the rising risk of nuclear conflict and arms racing requires new and bolder leadership from responsible states.

Implementing past action plans must be the floor and not the ceiling for taking forward the NPT's provisions. The risk of nuclear weapon use is all too high and is growing, particularly as offensive cyber operations and artificial intelligence introduce unprecedented uncertainty into the global security environment. It is this environment that demands bolder action from all states to reduce nuclear risks by eliminating nuclear weapons; action that is rooted in "deep concern at the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons". Many countries have demonstrated their commitment to nuclear disarmament by joining the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). The TPNW is a major contribution to the common goal of eliminating the threat of nuclear war and eliminating nuclear weapons.

3. Those that resist change also say the "environment" is not right for further progress, but responsible actors everywhere are rising to the challenge.

The world cannot wait until the environment is "right" for disarmament. It is true that success in conflict prevention and resolution, control of non-nuclear military capabilities, protection of human rights, climate and environmental protection, and other important endeavors would help to facilitate nuclear disarmament. But taking action for disarmament by negotiating agreements or through unilateral steps helps create an environment for achievement of a world free of nuclear weapons while building a climate of mutual trust that will positively contribute to solving the world's other pressing problems.

The postponement of the 2020 NPT Review Conference offers an unprecedented opportunity to change the current course, move beyond bitter politicisation, and focus efforts to bring about the end of nuclear weapons.

The 90 undersigned organisations call on NPT states parties and the international community to utilise this additional time wisely. The current situation requires new and bolder leadership from responsible states to work together to build majority support for a plan of action to advance NPT Article VI goals and create much needed momentum for further progress on disarmament, and to save humanity from the scourge of nuclear war.

More in-depth analysis and recommendations for NPT states parties' consideration over the next few months is provided following the list of endorsing organizations, to help in preparation for the Review Conference and to advance nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

To read the complete statement (10 pages) and see the list of 90 endorsing organizations, visit [joint-ngo-statement_May2020-updated.pdf](#)