

GLOBAL ENTERPRISE TO STRENGTHEN NONPROLIFERATION AND DISARMAMENT

May 2, 2023

Meeting Summary

The GE meeting focused on identifying ambitious yet practical options for nuclear risk reduction in the upcoming NPT review cycle. Participants recognized the pressing need for cooperative actions to lessen the threat of nuclear war in parallel with renewed pursuit of nuclear disarmament as outlined in Article VI. The August NPT PrepCom offers a crucial opportunity to establish a foundation and process for effectively identifying and implementing tangible risk reduction measures throughout the review cycle.

Ambitious but Practical Options for Nuclear Risk Reduction in the Next Review Cycle

- The idea of a **Risk Reduction Summit** was met with mixed views. Some participants suggested that a summit process could involve non-NPT members such as India and Pakistan and encourage unilateral or “minilateral” measures. But a majority of participants expressed concerns that creating a separate process would risk detaching nuclear risk reduction from the NPT’s Article VI disarmament obligation, replicate existing divisions, and enable forum-shopping by States parties.
- Focused explicitly on how to use the upcoming NPT review cycle to advance risk reduction, it was proposed that a group of like-minded states could sponsor a **resolution at the August PrepCom** stating that the use of nuclear weapons is unacceptable. This resolution could follow the example of the Canadian-coordinated resolution on the indefinite extension of the NPT, which gained support from a majority of NPT States parties during negotiations at the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference.
- Some participants suggested revisiting the idea of a **"gift basket" approach (referred to as “Joint Voluntary Commitments (JVCs) in the GE)**, through which individual nuclear weapons states (NWS) and groups of States parties could make risk reduction commitments throughout the review cycle. Two examples that were highlighted included commitments to abstain from making nuclear threats and to refrain from any additional forward deployments of nuclear weapons.
- Participants discussed the **value of declarations as an effective risk reduction tool**. It was noted that while declarations have been positively received in the past, the credibility of and trust in such statements is undermined by failure to fully implement past commitments. It also has been significantly weakened by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and its use of nuclear threats after the issuance of the January 2022 P5 statement. Several participants, therefore, underscored the importance of efforts to reach agreement on legally-binding negative security assurances.

- Related, participants discussed the need to **operationalize past commitments**, such as Action 5 of the 2010 Action Plan. (Under that commitment by NWS to accelerate concrete progress on steps leading to nuclear disarmament in a way that promotes international stability, peace and undiminished security for all, States parties agreed to pursue a series of broadly defined risk reduction goals.) Participants also considered other tangible actions to reduce nuclear risks, such as lowering the operational status of nuclear weapons and promoting transparency and accountability.
- While the conversation centered on the NPT process, several participants also expressed interest in **leveraging the United Nations** to strengthen norms and existing fora for nuclear risk reduction and disarmament, whether through a UN General Assembly resolution on nuclear risk reduction or through other UN mechanisms. Similarly, it was suggested that States parties should consider how to factor the TPNW into an ongoing risk reduction process.

Leveraging the 2023 PrepCom to Foster an Ongoing NPT Risk Reduction Dialogue

- Participants broadly agreed on the value of **setting aside sufficient dedicated time on the PrepCom agenda to discuss nuclear risk reduction** and continuing this practice throughout the review cycle. Views differed on how best to do this, with many participants skeptical of the idea of establishing a fourth Subsidiary Body focused specifically on risk reduction, as opposed to embedding the dialogue within existing structures and processes of the review cycle. Thus, participants saw value in encouraging the chair of the August PrepCom to engage in informal consultations prior to the PrepCom to gain diverse insights on the most effective way forward and to develop an agenda that would allow for thorough discussions of these issues.
- Participants agreed on the importance of **framing the discussion on nuclear risk reduction** accurately, ensuring inclusion of all perspectives and maintaining a strong link to nuclear disarmament. They highlighted the need for a two-fold approach: a more short-term “tactical” approach focused on specific actions to reduce today’s nuclear risks and a longer-term “strategic” vision that would address the inherent risks of nuclear weapons. Regarding the latter, one participant suggested a more honest dialogue to identify differences in opinion among States parties regarding the status of nuclear weapons, deterrence, and disarmament, potentially allowing States parties to explore the specific conditions under which NWS would reduce the role of their nuclear weapons.
- To improve discussions on risk reduction and **create an effective process throughout the review cycle**, participants agreed it would be helpful to structure the conversations based on working papers and other substantive inputs and to improve reporting on implementation of risk reduction commitments. The discussion should build on past results from the review process, with a goal of turning broad normative commitments into more specific, implementable actions. It also was stressed that States parties should consider how best to draw on the input of civil society and Track 1.5 and Track 2 discussions to build a shared baseline of knowledge and understanding. In that regard, participants highlighted the need for multiple stakeholders to take initiative in promoting the inclusion of all perspectives, ensuring the dialogue on risk reduction is representative of all NPT States parties.