

GLOBAL ENTERPRISE TO STRENGTHEN NONPROLIFERATION AND DISARMAMENT

June 27-28, 2023 – Geneva, Switzerland

Meeting Summary

The June 27-28 meeting of the Global Enterprise (GE) took place in Geneva, Switzerland and focused on advancing a shared risk reduction agenda in the 2026 NPT review cycle. Officials from more than 10 countries, plus a small number of non-government experts, discussed ambitious but practical options for reducing nuclear risks and putting in place effective processes for advancing risk reduction before, during, and after the August 2023 NPT PrepCom.

Key Takeaways

- Participants agreed that the risk of use of a nuclear weapon is higher than anyone would like, and states parties should find ways to reduce that risk. There was also broad acceptance of nuclear risk reduction as a legitimate part of the NPT discourse, provided it ties into existing obligations and is reflected in specific measures that fit into and support the NPT's pillars, in particular nuclear disarmament.
- However, perspectives on the nature and causes of nuclear risks varied, with some participants focused on “strategic risk reduction” and strategic stability, while others took a broader view that includes the inherent risk of nuclear weapons and therefore nuclear disarmament as an essential component of risk reduction. These differing perspectives contribute to making concrete progress on a common risk reduction agenda challenging.
- Reducing nuclear risks will require engagement at multiple levels, including among the five NPT nuclear weapon states, bilaterally among key states, and between nuclear weapon states (NWS) and non-nuclear weapon states (NNWS). While some NNWS are skeptical of NWS' approach to risk reduction, they remain interested in engaging with NWS on this topic.
- NNWS welcomed the ongoing consultations among NWS technical experts as part of the P5 process and expressed keen interest in having NWS provide further insights into those discussions throughout the NPT review cycle. At the same time, NNWS encouraged more action to operationalize past statements and commitments by NWS.
- Given the disparate perspectives on risk, some participants seemed to favor focusing on steps that fit best into the existing NPT discourse. Such steps could include:

- Recognition and implementation/operationalization of existing commitments, perhaps combined with increased transparency on the challenges countries face in implementing certain past commitments;
 - Strengthening national reporting practices and creating/increasing opportunities for structured, interactive dialogue between NWS and NNWS on the contents of those reports, including related to risk reduction; and
 - Increasing transparency as an important confidence-building step, recognizing that transparency exists on a spectrum and no NWS is fully transparent.
- Though challenging, there may be value in seeking to identify and advance risk reduction measures that would also support and advance the disarmament goals of the NPT. This could help respond to NNWS concern that discussion of risk reduction reinforces the nuclear status quo. There is precedent for risk reduction supporting disarmament: efforts to reduce U.S.-Soviet risks after the Cuban Missile Crisis led directly to the Limited Test Ban Treaty (LTBT) as an important practical and symbolic step.
 - Transparency could serve as one such “sweet spot,” as could measures aimed at mutually and/or unilaterally restraining NWS capabilities, intentions, and doctrines in a manner that operationalizes and reinforces their risk reduction declarations.
- Participants also discussed options for sustaining and strengthening the inclusion of the risk reduction agenda in the context of the NPT review process.
 - Multiple participants identified the Working Group on Strengthening the Review Process – which will meet just prior to the 2023 PrepCom – as a potential avenue for progress, particularly if it serves to support a return to the original intent behind the review process, which was to review NPT implementation, develop recommendations for RevCons, and facilitate constructive discussions.
 - There was broad interest in allowing for structured debate on national reports and working papers, in particular by dedicating time within the existing review process for NNWS to ask questions and engage in dialogue with NWS.
 - Participants discussed possible “rules of thumb” to make discussions of risk reduction more productive, for example by avoiding debates about how high the risk is. Instead, the focus should be directed toward actionable steps that can reduce nuclear risks at any level.
- Given broad interest in and concern about risk reduction, there could be an opportunity for an ad hoc group of states to develop and champion a more specific risk reduction agenda in the NPT context.
- The discussion also touched on potential opportunities for advancing risk reduction outside of the review cycle, given the politicization of the NPT discourse. One idea that garnered attention was the possibility of establishing a UN Group of Governmental Experts (GGE). However, for this initiative to be viable, it would require strong political commitment and a well-defined mandate/agenda which would clearly articulate the expected outputs.