



Critical Issues Forum

2014-2015

Topic: Nuclear Disarmament: Humanitarian Approach **Background Paper**

Introduction:

The humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons has drawn increasing attention as a fundamental global threat posed by nuclear weapons. Although the number of nuclear weapons in global stockpiles is declining, the risk of their use, by accident or design, appears to be growing. Any such use would have catastrophic humanitarian consequences.

Background:

The current world nuclear weapons status

Two decades after the Cold War, approximately 16,300 nuclear warheads remain in the arsenals of the countries that possess nuclear weapons, of which approximately 4,000 are actively deployed, and some 1,800 are on high alert and ready for use on short notice.¹ Almost seventy years after their development and their first and only use in war, [nuclear weapons](#) continue to be at the core of a number of states' national security policies. The [Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons \(NPT\)](#)² prohibits its [non-nuclear weapon state](#) (NNWS) parties from developing nuclear weapons. The treaty, however, exempts five *de jure* [nuclear weapon states \(NWS\)](#)³ (France, the [People's Republic of China](#), the [Russian Federation](#), the [United Kingdom](#), and the [United States](#)) from this ban. These five states had tested nuclear weapons before the treaty was negotiated in 1968. This historical situation created two categories of states in the world: nuclear “haves” and “have-nots.” Therefore, the NPT is often criticized because of its discriminatory nature. This discriminatory nature is, however, challenged by a legal obligation in [Article VI](#) of the treaty for the five nuclear weapon states to eventually disarm. Three other nuclear armed states—[India](#), [Israel](#), and [Pakistan](#)—have not joined the NPT, but are commonly considered *de facto* nuclear weapon states. [North Korea](#) withdrew from the NPT in 2003, and tested nuclear devices in 2006, 2009, and 2013.

Growing momentum of humanitarian initiative

Since the 2010 NPT Review Conference [final document](#) expressed deep concern about the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons, civil society,

¹ Hans M. Kristensen and Robert S. Norris, "Worldwide deployments of nuclear weapons, 2014," *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, August 26, 2014, <http://bos.sagepub.com/content/early/2014/08/26/0096340214547619.full.pdf+html>

² Nuclear Threat Initiative, "Glossary." NTI.org. <http://www.nti.org/glossary/#nonproliferation-treaty>

³ Nuclear Threat Initiative, "Glossary." NTI.org. <http://www.nti.org/glossary/#nuclear-weapon-states-nws>

international organizations, and several state parties (championed by Norway, New Zealand, Mexico, Austria, and Switzerland) have repeatedly highlighted this issue.⁴

The humanitarian initiative is shifting the focus away from perceived national security needs of a few states, to the nature and effects of the weapons themselves, thus posing the question of whether the continued existence of these weapons can be acceptable for humanity at all.

At the 69th United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) First Committee session in October 2014, 155 member states, led by New Zealand, co-sponsored [the joint statement](#) on the Humanitarian Impact on Consequences of Nuclear Weapons, an increase from [125 countries](#) that co-sponsored a similar statement at the 68th UNGA, [80 countries](#) that did so at the 2013 NPT Preparatory Committee meeting (PrepCom), [35 countries](#) at the 67th UNGA, and [16 countries](#) at the 2012 NPT PrepCom.

Humanitarian Initiative Conference:

Moreover, in March 2013, Norway [hosted a conference in Oslo](#) on the humanitarian and environmental impact of nuclear weapons. Attended by representatives from 127 countries as well as UN agencies, international organizations, and civil society, the Oslo conference addressed the international community's inability to address the humanitarian consequences of any nuclear detonation. The conference highlighted the immediate impact and longer-term consequences of any nuclear weapon use, on both nuclear weapons states and non-nuclear weapon states alike. Indicating the growing importance of humanitarian concerns in disarmament debates, many states expressed their wish to further explore these issues.

Following the Oslo conference, the Government of Mexico hosted the [Second Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons](#) in Nayarit in February 2014, where 146 states and civil society gathered. The [Chair's Summary](#) called for the development of new international standards on nuclear weapons, including a legally binding instrument.

This strong language contained in the summary—which is not a consensus document—indicates the possibility for the initiative to directly lead to the negotiation of a nuclear weapon convention, a treaty that would ban nuclear weapons for all states. Some countries, and in particular US allies such as Japan and some NATO countries, made clear their reservations with language supporting a convention.

P-5 (NPT Nuclear Weapon States) attitude to this initiative:

Despite these multilateral efforts, the five NPT-recognized nuclear weapon states boycotted both the Oslo Conference and Nayarit Conference, arguing that a "comprehensive" approach to nuclear disarmament is impossible and that initiatives besides those in the 2010 NPT action plan could "distract" from established disarmament plans.

⁴ Reaching Critical Will. "2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons: Final Document". ReachingCriticalWill.com
<http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/revcon2010/FinalDocument.pdf>

The third conference on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons will be held in [Vienna](#) in December 2014. This meeting will further explore the humanitarian and environmental impacts of a nuclear weapon detonation and will take a look at existing international law relevant to this issue. Austrian organizers have made clear that this conference is not a forum to negotiate a prohibition against nuclear weapons. As part of the efforts to engage NPT nuclear weapon states, some countries advocating humanitarian initiatives want to focus strictly on raising awareness about the risks of nuclear weapons without any mentioning a treaty banning nuclear weapons.

Through extensive discussions with the conference host government of Austria, and careful review of the conference agenda, and under [pressure from civil society](#), among the NPT NWS, the United States has decided to participate in the third humanitarian conference for the first time. In its statement, the United States “fully understands the serious consequences of nuclear weapons use and gives the highest priority to avoiding their [use](#).”

Where is this initiative going?

While the US participation in the conference is welcomed, it is not certain what direction this initiative will take. Among the states that advocate this humanitarian initiative, there are divergent views. States within the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) advocate negotiation of nuclear weapons convention that prohibits nuclear weapons, but many US allies are reluctant to support that idea.

In the lead up toward the upcoming 2015 NPT Review Conference that will be held in April 2015, this issue will be getting more and more attention, and will be one of the major issues at the Review Conference. Whether or not this initiative leads toward the negotiation of nuclear weapons convention remains to be seen, and generally, such negotiations are considered to be “premature.” The current NPT regime is in a dire situation; faced with ever more proliferation risks, unfulfilled obligations, and a growing distrust among various NPT state parties, many states believe that solidifying the NPT regime should be given priority.

The probability that NPT nuclear weapons states will agree to start negotiating a nuclear weapons convention is almost nil at this point. Having said that, it is certain that the humanitarian initiative will continue to increase its momentum and support from many countries and civil society. It is expected that this initiative will remain in the center of the nuclear disarmament agenda.

CIF students study this issue:

Against this backdrop, the 2015 NPT Review Conference will be held at a very important time in nuclear weapons history. 2015 marks the 70th anniversary of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombing anniversary. This year’s CIF academic year 2014-2015 falls in the run-up to this historical NPT Review Conference. Most importantly, the CIF spring conference will be held in Hiroshima immediately before the Review Conference.

This year, the CIF program will challenge participants to study how this humanitarian initiative will grow in the process of nuclear disarmament. Students will investigate if the humanitarian

initiative will lead to the negotiation of a nuclear weapons convention. Students will also study how this initiative fits in the current NPT review process. Students will study the merits and shortcomings of the existing nuclear nonproliferation regime, and investigate the future prospects of the NPT. At the same time, it is also important for CIF students to understand the current world nuclear weapons situation, proliferation threats, and states' policies toward nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament correctly. Based on these investigations, students will try to come up with their own assessment on how this humanitarian initiative can lead to a world without nuclear weapons. Participants will examine this topic in CIF's four content domains: scientific/environmental, social/cultural, economic, and political /geopolitical.