



**TOWARDS A NUCLEAR-WEAPON-FREE WORLD:
THE CONTRIBUTION OF PARLIAMENTS**

**Background paper submitted by
Mr. Blaine Calkins (Canada), co-Rapporteur**

Introduction

For more than six decades, the development, deployment and proliferation of nuclear weapons has posed significant challenges to the international community. The number of these weapons has been reduced significantly since the end of the Cold War. Nevertheless, they continue to play an important role in security perceptions and policies, even as the vast majority of States recognize that their use would result in catastrophic humanitarian consequences. At the same time, on-going efforts by a few States to develop nuclear weapons and the means to deliver them threaten regional and global peace and security; they also undermine the international regime that has been established to advance non-proliferation and disarmament.

The control of nuclear technology poses technical challenges. However, the fundamental objective of halting the further spread of nuclear weapons (non-proliferation) and reducing stockpiles of these weapons (disarmament) remains a political one. As such, States often differ on the necessary balance between and urgency of these two related actions. Yet it is only by fully implementing existing commitments in both – notably those embodied in the 1968 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) – that the ultimate goal of a world free of nuclear weapons will be possible.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) has long worked to “advance nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation with a view to strengthening international peace and security.”¹ Preventing the proliferation, reducing the number of and eventually eliminating all nuclear weapons have also long been policy objectives of individual parliamentarians in many IPU Member Parliaments, including Canada. Accomplishing these goals requires persistent efforts to ensure that the international community and its Member States follow through on their legal and political commitments to fully, transparently and verifiably implement the NPT. The NPT regime must also be strengthened where necessary. Parallel diplomatic efforts at the regional level could also reinforce or even act as a catalyst for progress at the broader multilateral level. All of these initiatives are dependent on political will, the key factor that will ultimately determine whether the NPT’s goals are realized.

¹ Inter-Parliamentary Union, Advancing nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, and securing the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban-Treaty: The role of parliaments, Addis Ababa, 10 April 2009.

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)

The NPT embodies a near-universal bargain. The five recognized nuclear-weapon States – the United States, Russian Federation, United Kingdom, France and China – that had detonated a nuclear device before January 1967 have committed to reduce and eventually eliminate nuclear weapons. Other States have undertaken not to acquire them. All States Parties have agreed to facilitate cooperation on the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.²

This regime has seen real success over the decades. Despite considerable fears over proliferation in the 1960s, today the number of nuclear-armed States is no more than nine. In the case of disarmament, although total nuclear arsenals are still estimated at over 17,000 weapons (more than 90 % of them held by the United States and Russia), this figure is significantly below the peak of over 60,000 from three decades ago.

Strengthening the regime

Yet the regime is not perfect. Proliferation has occurred, which in turn inevitably has a negative impact on disarmament. On the one hand, States can violate their commitments under the NPT, developing seemingly peaceful nuclear capabilities which can then be used for nuclear weapons. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea pursued this strategy, and on-going non-compliance with their NPT obligations by States such as the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Syrian Arab Republic raises similar fears. Furthermore, States that have not signed the Treaty can, and have, developed nuclear weapons outside it.

Beyond the NPT itself, other key elements necessary for non-proliferation and disarmament remain blocked by various States. These include the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), which was opened for signature in 1996, as well as the beginning of negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT), which would ban the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons.

Even so, the NPT embodies the legal and political commitment of the international community to achieve both non-proliferation and disarmament. It thereby establishes the standard to which all States – even those outside the Treaty – must be held. While the nuclear-weapon States bear the primary responsibility for nuclear disarmament and must be held accountable for it, all States are responsible for ensuring full compliance with both the letter and the spirit of the NPT.

States have acted to strengthen the international regime for non-proliferation and disarmament over the years. A key moment came in 1995, when the NPT Review Conference made the Treaty permanent (it had been negotiated for an initial period of 25 years). That same Conference imposed greater accountability on all States Parties; it also achieved agreement on a series of principles and objectives related to non-proliferation and disarmament. Five years later, the 2000 Review Conference saw agreement on practical steps for moving forward.

² Only four countries have never been party to the NPT: India, Israel, Pakistan and South Sudan. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea had acceded to the NPT, but later announced its withdrawal and claims the Treaty no longer applies to it.

Building Momentum

The terrorist attacks of September 2001 turned public and official attention in the United States and elsewhere to the more immediate security threat of international terrorism. While significant progress has been made in securing nuclear material, the NPT Review Conference in 2005 was not able to achieve a final document, reflecting the absence of consensus at that time. Recent years have thankfully seen renewed political momentum. Notable developments have included the release of a five-point proposal for nuclear disarmament by the Secretary-General of the United Nations³ and a seminal speech in 2009 by US President Barack Obama, in which he reaffirmed the goals of the NPT by articulating “America’s commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons...”⁴

The NPT Review Conference in May 2010 did achieve a final document. It contained a 64-point Action Plan which, inter alia, “calls on all nuclear-weapon States to undertake concrete disarmament efforts and affirms that all States need to make special efforts to establish the necessary framework to achieve and maintain a world without nuclear weapons.”⁵

Frustrations have also continued alongside this incremental process, including over such issues as the postponement of a long-sought international conference to begin discussions on a Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction-Free Zone. Yet there is cause for renewed optimism. The United Nations General Assembly, for example, decided to establish a group of governmental experts to begin discussion of possible elements of an FMCT, to establish an open-ended working group to develop proposals for the achievement and maintenance of a world without nuclear weapons, and to convene a high level-level meeting of the General Assembly on Nuclear Disarmament in September 2013.⁶ Given the context described above, the challenge in the months and years ahead will be to secure progress where possible, while building momentum around the kind of shared purpose that can make the next NPT Review Conference in 2015 a success and a blueprint for future action.

³ United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, [The United Nations and Security in a Nuclear-Weapon-Free World](#), the Secretary-General’s five point proposal on nuclear disarmament, 2008.

⁴ [Remarks by President Barack Obama](#), Hradcany Square, Prague, Czech Republic, 5 April 2009. Later that year, the United Nations Security Council resolved unanimously “... to seek a safer world for all and to create the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons, in accordance with the goals of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), in a way that promotes international stability, and based on the principle of undiminished security for all...”. See [Historic Summit of Security Council Pledges Support for Progress on Stalled Efforts to End Nuclear Weapons Proliferation, resolution 1887 \(2009\) Adopted with 14 Heads of State, Government Present](#), United Nations Security Council, SC 9746, 24 September 2009.

⁵ 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, [Final Document, Volume I](#), New York, 2010, p.20.

⁶ United Nations General Assembly, [Treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices](#), Resolution 67/53, 3 December 2012; United Nations General Assembly, [Taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations](#), Resolution 67/56, 3 December 2012; United Nations General Assembly, [High-level meeting of the General Assembly on nuclear disarmament](#), Resolution 67/39, 3 December 2012.

The Role of Parliaments

Given that almost all States are committed through the NPT to the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons, the question for parliamentarians is how to ensure implementation of the Treaty. At the global level, such action must be taken in a way that preserves security and stability, while achieving consensus among States. At the same time, efforts must also push for the universalization of the NPT, convincing those States outside the Treaty to join it by demonstrating that it is a means of strengthening national, regional and global security.

The unique responsibilities and knowledge of parliamentarians means they can play a key role in these endeavours. Among other things, they can: hold governments to account and ensure compliance with commitments and responsibilities under the NPT; convince governments to accept new commitments, mechanisms and responsibilities as required; and, mobilize public opinion and civil society to demand faster and deeper action.

In 2009, the IPU adopted a resolution towards these ends, the recommendations of which remain a focal point for parliamentary action.⁷ In cooperation with Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament (PNND), in 2012 the IPU also published a Handbook that comprehensively outlines good policies and practices that can be pursued to complement governmental efforts in non-proliferation and disarmament.⁸ It is precisely by pursuing such work and partnering with governments and civil society that parliamentarians can ensure that the aspiration of a world free of nuclear weapons will finally be realized.

⁷ Inter-Parliamentary Union, [Advancing nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, and securing the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban-Treaty: The role of parliaments](#), Addis Ababa, 10 April 2009.

⁸ Inter-Parliamentary Union, [Supporting Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament](#), Handbook for Parliamentarians No. 19-2012.