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# 2015 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

22 April 2015

Original: English

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New York, 27 April-22 May 2015

## Humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons

### Working paper submitted by Austria, Chile, Costa Rica, Egypt, the Holy See, Indonesia, Ireland, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Nigeria, the Philippines, South Africa, Sweden and Switzerland

1. The 2015 Review Conference will take place against a backdrop of increased knowledge and understanding of both the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons and the increasing risk of a nuclear weapon detonation. Although knowledge of the consequences and risks is not new — and indeed was one of the key drivers for the negotiation and agreement of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons — the compelling body of evidence that has been presented to the international community since the last Review Conference in 2010 has served to heighten awareness of the scale and extent of the consequences and thus the risks that will persist until nuclear weapons are eliminated. In turn, this awareness underscores the urgency with which States parties must implement the obligations and commitments made in the Treaty and through its review process for the achievement of a world without nuclear weapons.
2. The humanitarian imperative and key objective of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons is encapsulated in its first preambular paragraph: “Considering the devastation that would be visited upon all mankind by a nuclear war and the consequent need to make every effort to avert the danger of such a war and to take measures to safeguard the security of peoples”.
3. The 2010 Review Conference gave specific focus, inter alia, to this issue in its consensual conclusions and recommendations for follow-on actions (2010 action plan) by expressing “its deep concern at the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons” and reaffirming “the need for all States at all times to comply with applicable international law, including international humanitarian law”. Moreover, the 2010 Review Conference resolved in action 1 of the 2010 action plan that “All States parties commit to pursue policies that are fully compatible with the Treaty and the objective of achieving a world without nuclear weapons”.
4. The increased focus of the international community on the humanitarian impact of and risks associated with nuclear weapons can be seen as an amplification



of the deep concern expressed at the 2010 Review Conference and a valuable component of States parties' efforts to implement action 1 of the 2010 action plan.

5. Reflecting the centrality of the humanitarian imperative to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the overwhelming majority of States parties have supported and participated in activities that have heightened awareness about the fundamental importance of the complete elimination of nuclear weapons for the sake of all humanity.

6. At the 2012 session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2015 Review Conference, a group of 16 countries delivered a statement on the humanitarian dimension of nuclear disarmament. The statement highlighted the centrality of this dimension to the Treaty and also emphasized the application of all rules of international humanitarian law to nuclear weapons. Emphasizing the threat posed by nuclear weapons to the survival of humanity, the statement concluded that "it is of utmost importance that these weapons never be used again, under any circumstances" and acknowledged that "the only way to guarantee this is the total, irreversible and verifiable elimination of nuclear weapons, under effective international control, including through the full implementation of article VI of the Treaty".

7. This statement has been endorsed by a steadily increasing number of countries. In 2012, in the First Committee of the General Assembly, the statement was supported by 35 countries. Follow-up statements were endorsed by 80 countries at the 2013 session of the Preparatory Committee and 125 at the First Committee of the General Assembly in 2013. The statement delivered in the First Committee in 2014 was supported by more than three quarters of all countries. Support comes from the entire regions of Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as all Pacific Island developing States.

8. In addition to the growth in support for the joint statement on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons, awareness and recognition of those consequences have also been supported by the compelling evidence presented at the three international conferences hosted by the Governments of Norway (Oslo, March 2013), Mexico (Nayarit, February 2014) and Austria (Vienna, December 2014) respectively, and the growing number of States that participated in those conferences.

9. Those international conferences demonstrated that the consequences of a nuclear weapon detonation, irrespective of the cause, for humanity would include death, destruction and displacement as well as profound and long-term damage to human health, the environment, climate and socioeconomic development. The evidence showed that the scope, scale and interrelationship of the humanitarian consequences caused by nuclear weapon detonations are catastrophic and more complex than commonly understood and could even threaten the survival of humankind.

10. Nuclear testing in several parts of the world has left a legacy of serious health and environmental consequences. Radioactive contamination from those tests disproportionately affects women and children. It affected food supplies and continues to be measurable to this day. Testimonies have reminded policy- and decision makers of the imperative to ensure that there will be no more victims in the future.

11. Building upon the facts-based discussions at the international conferences in Oslo and Nayarit, the Conference in Vienna demonstrated that no State or international body could address the immediate humanitarian emergency and long-term consequences caused by a nuclear weapon detonation, or provide adequate assistance to victims. The imperative of elimination as the only guarantee against the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons use was reinforced at those international conferences.

12. The Chair of the Oslo Conference concluded that the effects of a nuclear weapon detonation, irrespective of the cause, would not be constrained by national borders and would affect States and people in significant ways, regionally as well as globally. The Nayarit and Vienna conferences highlighted that — even if the probability of a nuclear weapon detonation were to be considered low — given the catastrophic consequences of such an event, the risk is unacceptable. The risks of a nuclear weapon detonation, whether by accident, miscalculation or design, are evident, including through the vulnerability of nuclear weapon command and control networks to human error and cyberattacks, the maintaining of nuclear arsenals on high levels of alert and the forward deployment of nuclear weapons. The only way to eliminate the risk of a nuclear weapon detonation is the total elimination of nuclear weapons.

13. At the Vienna conference, nuclear weapons were discussed from different legal angles. There is no comprehensive legal norm universally prohibiting possession, transfer, production and use. However, experts stressed that the new evidence that has emerged in the past two years about the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons casts further doubt on whether these weapons could ever, under any circumstances, be used in conformity with international law, in particular international humanitarian law.

14. There is broad and increasing participation of States, United Nations entities, international organizations, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, academia, parliamentarians and other elected representatives, religious communities and civil society organizations in the international conferences and in the discourse on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons more broadly. This has made it evident that the humanitarian imperative must be put at the centre of all deliberations, obligations and commitments with regard to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, including in the context of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. The President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Peter Maurer, in his address in Geneva on 18 February 2015 stated: “We know now more than ever before that the risks are too high, the dangers too real. It is time for States, and all those of us in a position to influence them, to act with urgency and determination to bring the era of nuclear weapons to an end.”

15. The overwhelming call by the international community for urgent progress towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons as the only way to avoid the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons is a fact that must be acknowledged. It is the motivating force to the destination promised in the Non-Proliferation Treaty — a world without nuclear weapons.

16. Awareness of the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons and of the compelling case they make for the total elimination of nuclear weapons is not, and should not be, limited to the context of the Treaty. The humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons have been reflected in numerous United Nations resolutions,

including the first resolution adopted by the General Assembly in 1946. At the first special session devoted to disarmament, in 1978, the General Assembly stressed that “nuclear weapons pose the greatest danger to mankind and to the survival of civilization”.

17. In the pursuit of the key objectives of the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the full and effective implementation of the Treaty and the obligations and commitments on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation reached at the previous review conferences, the following recommendations to the 2015 Review Conference are made:

- (i) To welcome the fact that, during the past review cycle, findings and evidence on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons have been presented in fact-based discussions, including at international conferences.
- (ii) To recognize that the immediate, mid- and long-term consequences of nuclear weapon detonations, inter alia, on health, the environment, infrastructure, food security, climate, development, social cohesion and the global economy are significantly graver than previously understood, are interlinked, and would not be constrained by national borders but have regional or global effects, and may even threaten the survival of humanity.
- (iii) To be aware that the risk of a nuclear weapon explosion is significantly greater than previously assumed and is further increasing with proliferation, the lowering of the technical threshold for nuclear weapon capability and with the danger of the access to nuclear weapons and related material by terrorist groups.
- (iv) To express dismay at the unacceptable humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons and to reaffirm the need for all States at all times to comply with applicable international law, including international humanitarian law.
- (v) To recognize that new evidence that has emerged about the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons casts further doubt on whether these weapons could ever be used in conformity with international law, in particular international humanitarian law.
- (vi) To emphasize that the consequences of nuclear weapon detonations and the risks associated with this weaponry concern the security of all humanity.
- (vii) To affirm that it is in the interest of the very survival of humanity that nuclear weapons are never used again, under any circumstances.
- (viii) To be cognizant of the fact that the risk of nuclear weapons’ use can only be avoided through the total elimination of nuclear weapons and maintenance of a world free of nuclear weapons.
- (ix) To emphasize that the scope of consequences of a nuclear weapon detonation and risks associated raise profound moral and ethical questions.
- (x) To commit to further enhancing awareness of the humanitarian impact of and risks associated with nuclear weapons with a view to increasing the urgency with which a world without nuclear weapons is pursued and achieved.

(xi) To call on the nuclear-weapon States, pending the total elimination of their nuclear weapon arsenals, to take concrete interim measures with urgency to reduce the risk of nuclear weapon detonations and to increase their transparency and accountability in this regard.

(xii) To stress that in the light of the growing understanding of the risk posed by nuclear weapons and their devastating humanitarian consequences, there is an urgent need for the full implementation of existing obligations under the Non-Proliferation Treaty and its previous review conferences to identify and pursue effective measures for the achievement of a world without nuclear weapons, and to call on all States parties to spare no efforts in this regard.

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