

Tenth NPT Review Conference: Youth and the NPT

Webinar – 16 July

High Representative Nakamitsu

Mr. Brixey-Williams, Co-Director BASIC

Distinguished panellists

Dear representatives of the younger generation

I would like to express my sincere thanks to the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs and BASIC for organizing today's event. As the High Representative has already noted, these webinars continue to provide a way to discuss the major issues surrounding the Tenth NPT Review Conference and to maintain momentum during this postponement caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Today's event is important for two reasons. The first is that it falls on the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Trinity Test – the very first test of a nuclear weapon. The environmental and human devastation caused by nuclear testing is a driving impetus to not only ban all nuclear tests, but to eliminate all nuclear weapons.

The second reason this event is important is because if the Tenth Review Conference is to have a successful conclusion, it must listen to the voices of a diverse range of stakeholders.

That means providing equitable and meaningful participation for women, space for civil society to express their views, an opportunity for industry to participate, and – why we are here today – for the younger generations to have their say.

To those of you tuning in to today's event, I want to also thank you – for your interest and for your enthusiasm.

Listening to young people is vital for several reasons. First, because the world's youth have a long and storied history of pushing boldly and working hard for causes that many deem too difficult and, more importantly, achieving great

success in those causes. Second, because you bring different perspectives about the world and how to realize change. Finally, although they are not of your making, many of today's problems will also be yours to address.

Sadly, it seems that the quest to eliminate nuclear weapons will be one of your inheritances. The world has made great strides in the attainment of this goal, but three quarters of a century after the use of nuclear weapons against Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we still have a long way to go.

How can the NPT help achieve this goal? What relevance does a half a century old treaty continue to have in the face of a rapidly changing international environment? Why is securing a successful conclusion at the Tenth NPT Review Conference so important?

These are the questions I hope to answer today.

As many of you will know, 2020 is a double anniversary for the NPT. It marks both fifty years since the NPT entered into force and twenty-five years since it was indefinitely extended.

In the beginning, the NPT was envisaged as a stopgap measure of limited duration, one of several 'partial measures' to achieve a progress on nuclear disarmament.

It has evolved into much more.

The NPT is now widely regarded as the 'cornerstone of the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation framework' and a pillar of international peace and security. It is one of the most enduring and successful multilateral treaties in history – and not just treaties related to security, but all treaties. Even countries who were implacably opposed to its negotiation have become members.

This status and success exist for three core reasons.

First, under Article VI of the Treaty, the NPT contains legally binding commitments on its members to pursue nuclear disarmament, including the only such commitments on the five nuclear-weapon States identified in the Treaty.

Second, the Treaty imposes verifiable non-proliferation obligations on its members, implemented through the International Atomic Energy Agency's safeguards system.

Third, the NPT is near-universal in its membership. One hundred and ninety-one countries have joined the Treaty, meaning that its commitments and obligations are binding on almost all of the international community.

Under the auspices of the NPT, disarmament has moved forward – the massive reductions in nuclear weapons stockpiles were all couched as ‘effective measures’ under Article VI of the Treaty. Efforts to ban nuclear testing and create nuclear weapon-free zones have all taken impetus from the Treaty.

In the 1960s it was predicted that, by the turn of the century, there would be more than twenty new nuclear-armed States. That this has not happened is due to the NPT and its safeguards system.

The Treaty continues to produce real security benefits for all its members, a key driver behind its longevity.

The NPT was always intended as a bargain between three mutually reinforcing pillars – disarmament, non-proliferation and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy – all in the service of the Treaty’s ultimate ambition: A world free of nuclear weapons.

This third pillar, facilitating access to nuclear science, technology and energy, has been crucial to building support for the first two pillars. Under the NPT’s auspices, the IAEA has facilitated the adoption of day-to-day applications of nuclear science and technology in fields as diverse as energy, health, agriculture, drinking water, protection of fisheries, understanding climate change, and oceans.

The mutually reinforcing and balanced nature of NPT’s grand bargain was solidified with the Treaty’s indefinite extension in 1995. A strengthened review process of five-yearly review conferences, with three preparatory committee meetings, was designed to enable States Parties to look forward and “identify the areas in which, and the means through which, further progress should be sought in the future.”

The Review Conferences, in particular those in 2000 and 2010, have produced commitments to increase transparency, promote trust and reduce the risk of nuclear war, facilitated efforts to make the peaceful use of nuclear energy safer and more secure, and addressed the proliferation challenges of the day.

Half a century after its entry into force, the NPT is the multilateral forum for nuclear disarmament and for dialogue on some of the most pressing international security issues.

That role of the Treaty is as necessary today as ever.

The dangers posed by the potential use of nuclear weapons and nuclear proliferation are growing. The increasing tensions between nuclear-armed States has led to a resurgence in the reliance on nuclear weapons. At the same time, many of the treaties negotiated to prevent the use of nuclear weapons are being abandoned, without anything to replace them.

The Tenth NPT Review Conference provides an opportunity for its Parties to consider how to reverse these trends through the strengthened implementation of the Treaty and, at the same time, look forward and consider how progress can be made and emerging threats confronted.

As President-designate, it is not my job to prescribe what an outcome from the Review Conference should look like – that is entirely the prerogative of the NPT's States Parties. But it is my responsibility to facilitate an outcome that reflects all States Parties' interests, and that is balanced across all three of the NPT's pillars. It would include practical ideas to strengthen implementation of each pillar in the near, medium and long-term. And it would build upon and reinforce the outcomes from 1995, 2000 and 2010, including the commitments made at those Review Conferences.

Preventing the use of nuclear weapons and seeking their elimination, while ensuring non-proliferation and benefiting from the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, is one of the greatest challenges confronting humanity. But I believe we can make progress today. I look to you, the youth of the world, for your talent and ambition, for your imagination, determination and strength.

And I now look forward to hearing your ideas and suggestions. Of course, I will be happy to answer any of your questions.

Thank you.