

STRENGTHENING THE NPT REGIME: PRIORITIES FOR THE 2020 NPT REVCON

*December 3-4, 2019
Portobay Hotel, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil*

MEETING SUMMARY

On December 3-4, 2019, NTI, in partnership with NPSGlobal and supported by funding from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, convened a regional workshop to discuss strengthening the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) regime in anticipation of the April-May 2020 NPT Review Conference (RevCon). The purpose of the meeting was to:

- Discuss the current state of play in advance of the NPT RevCon
- Highlight potential opportunities for Latin American nations to contribute to a successful 2020 RevCon and advance the NPT's goals
- Identify priority commitments and actions to strengthen risk reduction (including the role of political statements affirming nuclear restraint), transparency, fissile material management, and peaceful uses of nuclear energy where countries could collectively focus efforts in advance of the RevCon
- Discuss strategy and tactics to make progress on agreeing and implementing priority commitments and actions both before and after the RevCon
- Assess the role of various government initiatives in building a pathway to disarmament, and offer specific recommendations to strengthen such initiatives

The following is a brief summary of key takeaways that emerged from the discussions.

2020 NPT Review Conference (RevCon)

- There was agreement that the RevCon will take place in an international situation that is not promising, marked by tensions among the great powers, erosion of arms control, heightened nuclear risks, and divisions. For that reason, the RevCon will be very important, and the global nuclear order could deteriorate even more if the RevCon is perceived as failing to achieve its goals.
- Participants discussed the divide between nuclear weapon states (NWS) and non-nuclear weapon states (NNWS) and the importance of not repeating mistakes of past RevCons. There was strong support for the NPT and using the 2020 RevCon to strengthen the NPT's credibility, affirming its vital role, and creating a renewed sense of common purpose among the Parties. It was also noted that the main purpose of the RevCon is to assess implementation of the NPT.
- In particular, participants noted the need to find deliverables for all three pillars of the NPT – nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation, and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. It was

stressed by some participants that any actions in this regard should be focused on implementing previous commitments and not adding still more commitments while earlier commitments had yet to be fulfilled. The importance of the U.S. and Russia extending New START was also noted, and such an action would be viewed positively by the international community.

- It was noted that by reaching agreement on specific actions to advance the NPT's goals, the RevCon could strengthen the credibility of the NPT and help bridge the divide between NWS and NNWS. It was suggested that Latin American countries could help to facilitate meaningful dialogue on possible actions.
- Several participants noted the importance of going back to basics and helping to rebuild cooperation among Parties. This could include political statements that reaffirm commitment to the NPT.
- There was discussion on the necessity – and the content – of a consensus outcome document. Several participants stated that any final document should include a reaffirmation of the NPT as well as of past commitments, along with specific actions to implement them. Other participants suggested a more pragmatic approach focused on specific issues, such as risk reduction actions and commitments to greater transparency, to simulate progress in this difficult environment.
- It was noted that another way to make progress and demonstrate Parties' ability to cooperate would be through joint voluntary commitments made by groups of states, even while still pursuing a consensus final document.

Risk Reduction and Transparency

- There was concern about the possible erosion of the taboo against nuclear use and the risk of use of nuclear weapons today. Some participants also expressed concern that some NWS are renewing interest in lower-yield nuclear weapons, which could increase the risk of nuclear use.
- Participants agreed that a discussion of nuclear risk reduction should take place at the RevCon, but that any such discussion should be in the context of Article VI and should make clear that risk reduction is not a substitute for progress toward Article VI's disarmament goal. Some participants also stressed that nuclear risk reduction efforts should not be taken to suggest that there is a responsible way to possess nuclear weapons.
- Participants explored ways to intensify the existing dialogue on nuclear doctrines among P5 countries to include risk reduction and crisis avoidance. One step discussed was the creation of a P5 working group on reducing nuclear risks and crisis avoidance. In addition, some participants suggested that dialogue between the NWS and NNWS should be expanded through a two-tier process: discussions among the NWS and inviting some NNWS to join a P5+NNWS process.
- An affirmation by the five NWS of the Reagan-Gorbachev statement that a "nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought" was explored as a possible risk reduction measure. There was considerable interest in seeking such an affirmation, although some participants noted that to try and fail to reach agreement on such a statement could be worse than not trying at all.
- Participants also noted the importance of strengthening transparency both among NWS and between NWS and NNWS. Increased transparency among NWS was seen as a means to

address misperceptions, reduce uncertainty that may be contributing to an arms competition among the NWS, and build confidence.

- It was noted that increased transparency between NWS and NNWS could build a deeper understanding of the political objectives of NWS and their views of the current geopolitical situation. Here, too, transparency's fundamental purpose, it was suggested, is to build confidence.
- A specific recommendation was for other NWS to follow the UK example in which the UK engaged NNWS (and provided opportunity to comment and interact) in the process of drafting their national report highlighting UK efforts on disarmament, verification, and safeguards. More broadly, there was support for increased interactive dialogue between NWS and NNWS in the review process based on enhanced reporting.
- The planned NWS side-event on nuclear doctrine at the RevCon would be another opportunity for interactive dialogue. Some participants stressed that this event should focus on explanations of doctrine and not on attempts to justify possession of nuclear weapons or to get NNWS to agree with the NWS doctrines.
- Participants discussed the topic of strengthening negative security assurances and the potential adoption of legally binding mechanisms of "no-first-use." It was suggested by some participants that such assurances help bridge the gap between the disarmament framework and the risk reduction framework.

Fissile Material Management

- Various proposals to strengthen fissile material management – including reporting, safeguarding, and ensuring the security of fissile materials – were discussed.
- Some participants raised the imbalance between the lack of transparency of military materials compared to civilian materials. An option to begin to address this issue could be to develop an overall framework for a comprehensive baseline of information on both civil and military materials as well as their production facilities. Then it could be possible to identify incremental steps to begin to provide information to "fill in" over time the baskets of that comprehensive framework.
- Participants lamented the lack of progress on a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT) and the lack of political will to move forward. Brazil's proposed framework model for making progress toward an FMCT was highlighted. The possibility was raised of taking FMCT negotiations out of the Conference on Disarmament (CD).
- The proposal to pursue regional highly-enriched uranium-free zones (HEUFZ) was discussed, but some participants questioned its viability for Latin America because such an HEUFZ would limit the development of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy

- Participants recognized that nuclear energy is a key tool to increase quality of life around the globe. Many participants also noted that the peaceful use of nuclear energy is an important component of the NPT and that the RevCon is an opportunity to discuss the contribution of nuclear energy to addressing climate change as well as achieving sustainable development goals.

- Participants noted the important example of regional cooperation between Argentina and Brazil. It was suggested that the RevCon might be a good place to discuss collaborative regional approaches to the use of nuclear energy comparable to that between Argentina and Brazil for countries seeking to expand their use of peaceful nuclear technology.
- Some of the challenges raised for peaceful uses included the need for more investment from governments – including in developing new technology and to enhance sustainability and the safety/security of infrastructure – as well as the need for better coordination between the UN and IAEA.
- There was also discussion about the importance of transparency and cooperation in safeguards. In addition, it was suggested that good arguments and more work are necessary to educate publics about safe and secure use of nuclear energy.

Nuclear Deterrence and Nuclear Disarmament

- There was general agreement among participants that vocabulary, language, and interpretation play a critical role in the discussion of nuclear deterrence and disarmament. It was also noted that disarmament and deterrence are not necessarily opposing notions, but that disarmament is a legal obligation and deterrence is a doctrine.
- For some participants, the concept of nuclear deterrence was seen to be only a justification for retaining nuclear weapons, while others viewed interim reliance on deterrence as not inconsistent with the process for disarmament since both have the same goal: preventing the catastrophic use of nuclear weapons. This second group of participants saw a need for more thinking about how to reduce reliance on deterrence over time as a step to move beyond reliance on nuclear deterrence.
- Participants put forward ideas to bridge the divide between advocates of deterrence and of disarmament, including using the RevCon to remind States Parties of the goal shared by all: avoid nuclear use. Affirming the Reagan-Gorbachev statement could be one way to do this. At the same time, some participants again stressed the NPT's nuclear disarmament obligation as being the critical goal.
- Participants noted that much time has been spent on attempting to determine which forum and which approach would be best to achieve progress on nuclear disarmament. It was also noted that if there is the will to make progress, discussions about the exact forum become unnecessary.
- Participants acknowledged the potential value of new initiatives such as Creating the Environment for Nuclear Disarmament (CEND) and the Stepping Stones initiative. Any substantive contributions to move the disarmament process forward and not backward, one participant suggested, will be seen as positive. However, given its initial stages, it was suggested that the CEND would have little impact at the RevCon.
- The contribution of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) to nuclear disarmament was highlighted by some participants, but there were differences within Latin American states about ratifying the TPNW. TPNW supporters stated that they did not want the TPNW issue to disrupt the RevCon, while those opposed to the TPNW expressed concern that it could erode the NPT review process and the NPT itself.