

Should the NPT Do More? Pathways for Comprehensive Risk Reduction and Victim Assistance in the Review Process

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons are widely acknowledged, their implications for global governance remain contested in international fora. As a number of states and civil society organizations seek to incorporate the humanitarian agenda into the dialogue around the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), they face resistance from states that rely on nuclear deterrence and stick to security-oriented agendas. This YDCC Policy Brief explores the current state of efforts to advance inclusive risk reduction, victim assistance and environmental remediation within the NPT framework.

As nuclear weapons have regained prominence in geopolitical competition, the policy implications of their humanitarian impact remain contested terrain. Within this fractured landscape, a vocal bloc of states and civil society actors has labored to insert humanitarian-informed perspectives on nuclear risks and victim assistance into forums like the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). Clashing with narrower security-driven agendas, these efforts face resistance as they challenge entrenched strategic narratives — exposing tensions between nuclear-weapon states (NWS) and their allies on one side, and non-nuclear-weapon states (NNWS), who prioritize a broader approach to security and nuclear weapons, on the other¹.

This YDCC paper examines the diplomatic landscape surrounding efforts to integrate humanitarian-informed approaches into the NPT review process. In doing so it also looks at the related developments at other fora, such as the Meetings of States Parties (MSP) to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) and the United Nations General Assembly First Committee.

The paper focuses on two thematic clusters — 1) comprehensive risk reduction and 2) victim assistance and environmental remediation as NPT governance

issues — highlighting their increasing prominence in NPT proceedings. The emphasis on risk reduction and victim assistance derives from the humanitarian initiative’s core pillars: confronting the catastrophic risks and humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons as well as addressing their long-term impacts through justice-oriented measures like victim assistance and environmental remediation. Notably, both issues appear to garner increasing attention from states across traditional divides, suggesting a possible trend toward integrating humanitarian principles into the NPT’s framework.

This YDCC paper stems from the conviction that, together these clusters form a cohesive humanitarian narrative: a comprehensive understanding of nuclear risks underscores the urgency of preventive measures, while the ongoing suffering of victims and the environmental damage concretizes the catastrophic consequences of inaction. By addressing both existing harm retrospectively (through victim assistance and environmental remediation) and future harm prospectively (through risk reduction), the paper argues for an integrated approach — one where lessons from past suffering reinforce the moral and practical imperative to prevent future catastrophes.

COMPREHENSIVE RISK REDUCTION IN THE NPT REVIEW PROCESS

Nuclear dangers and risks have long been a matter of widely shared concern. Yet, there are very distinct approaches towards nuclear risks among NPT states

parties. While NWS and their allies perceive nuclear risks as something manageable in the context of strategic stability, many NNWS that don’t rely on nuclear

¹ Norway — relying on NATO’s nuclear umbrella while actively driving the humanitarian agenda — nuances this dichotomy.

deterrence hold a more critical view on nuclear weapons and security. Among the latter are states parties to the TPNW, which perceive nuclear risks as desired by nuclear deterrence practices themselves and, thus, hardly manageable in a sustainable way.

The Report of the coordinator of the consultative process on security concerns of States under the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (hereafter, the report) resulted from the consultative process on security concerns of TPNW states and presented at the 3rd MSP points to “a stark divide” between the two approaches. It stresses that risks stem from the very existence of nuclear weapons and “policies based on implicit or explicit nuclear threats”^I, meaning risks emanating from nuclear weapons and nuclear deterrence at any time^{II}. It, thus, problematizes both general (at peace time) deterrence – with no need of explicit threats – and immediate (at a time of crisis) deterrence. NWS and their allies’ reliance on nuclear deterrence – the report elaborates – creates an aggregated and interconnected set of global and existential risks that undermine the security of all states, not only those engaged in nuclear deterrence practices². For TPNW states, the consequences of nuclear explosions are the risks to which they are also exposed, against their will and without their control³. A comprehensive approach to risk reduction corresponding to the security concerns of TPNW states would consequently ensure that nuclear weapons are never used, intentionally, unintentionally, inadvertently or through human or technical error⁴.

As noted in UNIDIR’s “Nuclear Risks: Perceptions and Pathways”^{III} there is a lack of discussion at the regional and international levels on the potential spillover effects of nuclear use on countries neighboring NWS⁵. This concern is echoed in the TPNW security report, which highlights that several states parties to the TPNW are neighbors or located near nuclear-armed or -hosting

states and are therefore exposed to particular nuclear risks: “in case of nuclear conflict, nuclear facilities or other military/strategic facilities in such States [nuclear-armed or -hosting states neighbouring TPNW states] may become direct and primary targets of nuclear attacks, causing severe radioactive contamination. Mass migration would likely follow, with populations fleeing both affected and neighbouring areas”⁶. As the argument unfolds “pending nuclear weapons elimination – the gold standard of risk-reduction – nuclear weapons should be as far removed from any use or accident as possible, including through greater transparency about postures and actual use scenarios”⁷. It concludes that given the potentially global consequences, it is in the vital interest of all to ensure maximum transparency and precautionary measures.⁸ Presenting key arguments and recommendations of the report at a recent VCDNP webinar, Ambassador Alexander Kmentt of Austria – coordinator of the consultative process on security concerns – said that greater transparency about nuclear postures and use scenarios is a legitimate appeal from TPNW states, including those neighbouring nuclear-armed or -hosting states, to allow possible level of preparedness to protect their populations in case of a nuclear catastrophe⁹.

„Greater transparency about nuclear postures and use scenarios is a legitimate appeal from TPNW states, including those neighbouring nuclear-armed or -hosting states, to allow possible level of preparedness to protect their populations in case of a nuclear catastrophe.“

The ideas that found their place in the security report had been reflected in working papers of dual NPT-TPNW members and other humanitarian-aligned NPT states in the current cycle of the NPT review process^{IV}. In their 2024 working paper “Failure by the nuclear-weapon

- II** As the argument goes “Nuclear-armed States ... focus on “strategic risk reduction”, understood as counter-ing risks that could undermine nuclear deterrence relationships. The focus of this approach is to make nuclear deterrence less risky rather than to consider the risks of nuclear deterrence itself and therefore reject measures that limit nuclear weapon use, which is considered to negatively affect the credibility of nuclear deterrence. See Report of the coordinator for the consultative process on security concerns of States under the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (Austria), [Distr.: General] 7 February 2025, p. 9, <https://www.reachingcritical-will.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/nuclear-weapon-ban/3msp/documents/7r.pdf>.
- III** This report provides a summary of deliberations from a UNIDIR-organized retreat, which examined NWS’ views on nuclear risks and potential avenues for risk reduction.
- IV** The process on security concerns unfolded after the TPNW 2MSP, held in late 2023, and preceded deliberations at the 2024 NPT PrepCom. The report was published in the run up to the TPNW 3MSP, held in March 2025. References to the ideas incorporated in the report may appear in statements or even working papers of states parties for the upcoming 2025 PrepCom. According to Ambassador Kemntt, the ideas incorporated in the report are to be distilled in working papers for the 2026 RevCon, as the narrow window between the TPNW 3MSP and the 2025 NPT PrepCom left little time for coordination in the run up to the latter. For more

States to progress their nuclear disarmament obligations and commitments is contributing to unprecedented levels of nuclear risk “ the New Agenda Coalition (NAC)^V takes a broader view on nuclear risks stipulating that “the risks of nuclear weapons use cannot be simply managed away”¹⁰. They elaborate on this stating that “deterrence is posited on the very existence of nuclear risk, which incentivizes downplaying the consequences of nuclear weapons use, including by claiming that the catastrophic reality of those consequences is a con- straining factor on the risk of use, thus posing a circular argument”¹¹.

In a different NPT working paper “Measures to reduce the breadth of risks associated with nuclear weapons and measures to avoid increasing this risk” a group of 11 NPT members that are also TPNW parties/signatories^{VI} take it even further. They stipulate that given the fact that the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons know no borders, reducing risks associated with these weapons, and mitigating factors that could lead to their use, are therefore in the security interest of all states – NWS and NNWS alike – and their populations¹². Thus, NWS should ensure access to information to be reported by them in the fulfillment of the commitments to transparency made during the review process to the public and to neighbouring and other states¹³.

Elaborating on the argument for more transparency, TPNW states claim that in the view of the transbound- ary and possible global effects of nuclear weapon

explosions, NWS should ensure accountability in nuclear doctrines and operational plans through an assessment of their nuclear planning and consistency with cardinal principles of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) which is of vital importance for states not parties to a conflict. There is also a lack of information on what remedial measures, if any, are in place to address the conse- quences and compensate third states from the effects of nuclear explosions¹⁴.

To support the pathway toward integrating a more comprehensive transparency approach into nuclear discussions, TPNW states should seek to engage with existing NPT groupings — such as the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative (NPDI) and the Stockholm Initiative — which aim to revitalize disarmament diplo- macy, cooperation, and confidence-building through transparency^{VII}. To add credibility to their proposals, TPNW states could adopt the NPDI’s model and align their transparency demands with the grouping’s practi- cal approach to confidence- and security-building mea- sures (CSBMs) — as outlined in the respective working papers to the 2024 and 2025 PrepComs¹⁵. By adopting the NPDI’s model of specific, actionable frameworks^{VIII}, TPNW advocates might outline measurable steps for NWS — such as disclosing emergency response plans —to ensure NWS actions do not obstruct NNWS from fulfilling their responsibilities to shield populations from nuclear harm. NPDI members and TPNW states par- ties could cautiously explore opportunities to the two frameworks^{IX}.

details, see VCDNP, “Security Risks Emanating from Nuclear Weapons – A TPNW Perspective [webinar]”, March 31, 2025, <https://vcdnp.org/security-risks-nuclear-weapons-tpnw/>.

- ^V Among its six members are parties to the TPNW (Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand and South Africa) and its signatory (Brazil) alongside Egypt that has not yet signed or ratified the treaty but did vote for its adoption, participated in its negotiations and endorsed the Humanitarian Pledge. It also observed all the MSPs. Addressing the 2MSP, Egypt highlighted that “a discussion which premises itself on the humanitarian and ethical imperative of the prohibition of nuclear weapons and their total elimination is a ray of light at a time, where once again, the approach of nuclear disarmament through gradual incremental roadmaps and risk reduction measures is proving to be furthest from productivity and concrete progress. See Statement by the Delegation of the Arab Republic of Egypt At the 2nd Meeting of the States Parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), General Exchange of Views, 28 November 2023, UNHQ, New York, p. 3, https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/nuclear-weapon-ban/2msp/statements/29Nov_Egypt.pdf.
- ^{VI} The group comprises Austria, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Ireland, Kiribati, Mexico, Paraguay, San Marino and Thailand
- ^{VII} These groupings feature diverse participation, comprising nuclear-allied states, humanitarian-aligned NPT parties and TPNW members.
- ^{VIII} Among those who are skeptical or even opposed to the ban treaty but still attempt — at least intellectually — to engage with its core humanitarian arguments, you might hear that they struggle to envision a practical agenda for meaningful engagement.
- ^{IX} Alongside the NPDI framework, TPNW states parties may also wish to follow the ongoing development of the Nuclear Transparency Inventory Project (launched by BASIC and co-funded by Canada and the Netherlands,

The Stockholm Initiative, which is more diverse than the NPDI in terms of representation^X and focuses on the disarmament pillar, looks even more promising in this respect. The Initiative’s working papers for the previous and current NPT review cycle — including that on risk reduction — already contain references to catastrophic humanitarian consequences¹⁶. That gave hope that it might be the platform for deliberations about widening the approach to nuclear risks and going beyond strategic risk reduction^{XI}. Addressing the 2024 PrepCom, the Stockholm Initiative identified humanitarian consequences as “the main issues identified for the current Review Cycle”¹⁷. Its working paper for the conference therefore deserves special attention. The document entitled “Stepping up efforts: towards a successful review cycle” has a separate and extensive section on humanitarian consequences entitled “Humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons, including measures aimed at victim assistance and environmental remediation”. The initiative proposes all states parties of the NPT to, inter alia, “commit to a dialogue on the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of the use of nuclear weapons, and the need for all states at all times to comply with international humanitarian law and other applicable international law”¹⁸.

There is little hope that the five nuclear states under the NPT (hereafter, N5) will agree to have a conversation about IHL application to nuclear practices, comprehensive transparency and risk reduction regimes. As Oliver Meier summarized in response to the [security concerns] report’s recommendations, “Some will just not engage with the supporters of the TPNW and their arguments in the current context”¹⁹.

Still, to explore opportunities for engagement between the N5 and humanitarian-aligned NNWS — and specifically NWS and TPNW states parties, a dialogue could be launched at the expert level. It could be an initiative along the lines of N5 Expert Level Track (ELT) that was launched by the Center for Energy and Security Studies (CENESS) during the last year of Russia’s chairhip over the process to sustain dialogue at the level possible in the current environment²⁰. An N5-TPNW Expert Level Dialogue on Security Concerns would engage independent experts from N5 and TPNW states and/or experts from any other state who possess both the willingness to participate and relevant subject-matter knowledge. The idea behind this endeavor would be to identify workable areas of possible substantive engagement between N5 and TPNW on mutual security concerns. The initiative

both NPDI members). The project aims to catalogue and assess transparency measures across different nuclear-armed states — including those outside the NPT — and could provide additional practical tools for advancing transparency under the TPNW. For more details about the project, see Lyndon Burford, “Announcement: BASIC Launches the Nuclear Transparency Inventory Project”, BASIC, January 15, 2025, <https://basicint.org/announcement-basic-launches-the-nuclear-transparency-inventory-project/>.

- X The Stockholm Initiative is more diverse than the NPDI, encompassing both nuclear-allied and non-aligned states. It includes deterrence supporters, TPNW members and humanitarian advocates like Switzerland, which is neither part of a nuclear alliance nor a TPNW state but consistently champions humanitarian efforts.
- XI Some members of the Initiative that are both nuclear- and humanitarian-aligned, such as Australia, took note of humanitarian impacts and divergent approaches to risks in their statements. Addressing the 2024 PrepCom Australia acknowledged “efforts to raise awareness about humanitarian consequences and that there are different views on how to address nuclear risks”. See Statement by Australia, General Debate, NPT Preparatory Committee 2024, [delivered] 22 July 2024, p. 2, https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/prepcom24/statements/22July_Australia.pdf. Australia belongs to the group of states supporting “alternative” or more moderate humanitarian agenda (institutionalized with the more moderate “alternative humanitarian statement” — also called the “Australian statement” — at the First Committee. See joint statement on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons, Delivered by Ambassador Peter Woolcott Australian Permanent Representative to the United Nations Geneva and Ambassador for Disarmament UNGA68 First Committee, 21 October 2013, https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/1com/1com13/statements/21Oct_Australia2.pdf. Reacting to the annual (since 2012) First Committee resolution on humanitarian consequences that was brought to vote in 2024, a group of 20 nuclear-allied states, led by Australia, issued a statement saying they take seriously the humanitarian and environmental impacts of nuclear use and testing, but that security considerations will remain central to their disarmament work, hence the abstention on the resolution. See Statement by HE Mr James Larsen, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations, Explanation of Vote on Humanitarian Consequences 1C resolution, 4 November 2024, https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/1com/1com24/eov/L36_Australia.pdf. Australia has consistently abstained on the resolution. It observed all the TPNW MSPs.

could be coordinated by an NGO with a good will to serve as a bridge-builder in this discussion.

Another option could be to integrate a dedicated project on the humanitarian agenda into the N5 Young Professionals Network — as proposed by BASIC²¹ — and to organize deliberations on humanitarian issues and security concerns with young professionals from TPNW states. Despite the fact that N5 Young Professionals are nominated by their capitals, they are apparently not instructed to limit their discussions to specific topics^{XII}. While introducing an outreach mechanism constitutes a separate matter and presents distinct challenges, this does not preclude raising the proposal for consideration.

Even without meaningful engagement from the N5, all states should cooperate to build and disseminate knowledge and understanding of the impacts of nuclear weapons^{XIII} to be better prepared to protect their populations should the need arise. A landmark step in this direction is the establishment of a new UN study on the consequences of nuclear war, as outlined in the First Committee resolution proposed by Ireland and New Zealand at the 79th session²². The study will convene a panel of 21 experts to assess both the physical effects and societal repercussions of nuclear conflict²³.

The initiative is particularly relevant as it has been nearly

four decades since the United Nations last examined the effects of nuclear war. Zia Mian and Alan Robock further highlight the limitations of national studies^{XIV}, which lack the global scope and comprehensiveness of this UN-mandated initiative:

“A new U.N.-mandated expert study assessing and addressing the current knowledge of the effects of nuclear war can spur a better-informed, inclusive and much-needed global debate on what nuclear war means for people and the planet. It would be especially important for people and countries that have not done nuclear war studies of their own, but would be innocent bystanders in any nuclear war”^{XV}

While the proposed panel on nuclear weapons impacts already commands majority support as demonstrated in First Committee deliberations, states parties should work to ensure this initiative achieves visible and substantive integration within the NPT framework. Backers of the initiative should institutionalize support for the panel by securing its formal inclusion in the NPT review process documents. That said, the true significance of the review process lies not in its final or other documents per se, but in its ability to foster what Zia Mian calls “collective, organized conversations”²⁴—spaces where new evidence challenges entrenched positions, and shared understanding gradually replaces unilateral

XII As we are informed, at least some NWS see the format as primarily educational.

XIII This perspective is articulated in, inter alia, the Stockholm Initiative’s working paper “Stepping up efforts: towards a successful review cycle”. For more details on the paper, see “Stepping up efforts: towards a successful review cycle”, Working paper submitted by the members of the Stockholm Initiative for Nuclear Disarmament (Argentina, Canada, Ethiopia, Finland, Germany, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Norway, Republic of Korea, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland), 28 May 2024, p. 4, <https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/prepcom24/documents/WP13.pdf>. The need to fund evidence-based research on this issue was also emphasized by Norway’s representative during the 2024 NPT PrepCom side event “Advancing Complementarity of the TPNW with Other Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Treaties: Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons,” co-hosted by Ireland and Thailand [22 July 2024]. At the time, they highlighted ongoing work by the Norwegian Radiation and Nuclear Safety Authority (DSA) on a study examining nuclear detonation consequences and emergency response, research that was ultimately published in December 2024 as part of the OECD-NEA CRPPH Report. For more details, see “Radiological Protection During Armed Conflict: Improving Regulatory and Operational Resilience”, Report of a Joint Workshop organised by the DSA in co-operation with the NEA, 22-24 November 2023, https://www.oecd-nea.org/upload/docs/application/pdf/2025-01/nea_crpph_r_2024_3.pdf.

XIV For example, the US study mandate is to assess only nuclear winter-related effects — not radioactive fallout and other effects, Mian and Robock explain. For more see François Diaz-Maurin, UN to conduct new study of the broad impacts of nuclear war. Not all countries want to know”, Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, November 5, 2024, <https://thebulletin.org/2024/11/un-to-conduct-new-study-of-the-broad-impacts-of-nuclear-war-not-all-countries-want-to-know/>.

XV It continues by highlighting that the study “also would help governments and people in nuclear-armed states better understand the nature, scale and severity of the many catastrophic consequences of nuclear war, not just for adversaries but for everyone, including themselves”. See *ibid*.

narratives.

By strengthening the evidentiary foundations of the deliberative spaces, the UN-study initiative seeks to enrich global discourse, nurture dialogue, and ultimately reinforce the nuclear taboo²⁵. On this point, the ICRC emphasizes that “ensuring that governments, the media and the general public understand the immediate and long-term consequences of any use of nuclear weapons inspires caution, strengthens the taboo against the use of nuclear weapons”. The ICRC underscores that maintaining focus on the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons must remain central to NPT debates and decisions – not only as a moral imperative but as an important risk reduction measure in its own right²⁶.

„The absence of explicit provisions for nuclear justice-related issues in the treaty text does not inherently preclude their legitimate inclusion in the NPT’s political and discursive sphere, even without a formal institutionalization.“

This focus on humanitarian consequences – and the sobering lessons from ongoing impacts requiring victim assistance and environmental remediation – provides critical evidence of what nuclear weapons truly do, reinforcing why they must never be used – and tested – again. These tangible consequences not only demand redress but serve as indispensable warnings for risk reduction. Guided by this understanding, the following section examines pathways for – and challenges to – incorporating victim assistance and environmental remediation into the NPT framework.

VICTIM ASSISTANCE AND ENVIRONMENTAL REMEDIATION IN THE NPT REVIEW PROCESS

Even beyond TPNW membership, there is broad recognition of victim assistance and environmental remediation as shared priorities, as underscored by the ICRC²⁷. Originally anchored in the TPNW, issues of victim assistance and environmental remediation have already entered discussions within the NPT review framework. As Jana Baldurs and Caroline Fehl note, incorporating nuclear justice, including victim assistance and environmental remediation, into the NPT framework could serve

Policy Recommendations

This paper offers three policy recommendations in the risk reduction cluster.

Recommendation 1: States parties to both the NPT and TPNW should build synergies by:

- strengthening transparency measures by adopting the NPDI’s model of specific, actionable frameworks to enhance accountability for protecting populations from nuclear harm;
- exploring alignment between TPNW and NPDI transparency approaches to advance shared goals, ensuring cautious but progressive cooperation; and
- leveraging the Stockholm Initiative’s humanitarian focus to expand discussions on IHL compliance and integrate comprehensive risk reduction into NPT proceedings.

Recommendation 2: The N5, TPNW parties and NGOs should pursue targeted engagement by:

- launching an N5-TPNW expert-level dialogue on security concerns; and/or
- organizing dedicated deliberations between the N5 Young Professionals Network and TPNW-state youth professionals, focusing on humanitarian impacts and contrasting security doctrines.

Recommendation 3: Humanitarian-aligned states and NGOs should advance evidence-based comprehensive approaches by:

- promoting the understanding that the new UN study on nuclear war effects serves to institutionalize the nuclear taboo’s evidentiary foundations; and
- ensuring the initiative achieves visible and substantive integration within the NPT framework through its formal inclusion in the review process – specifically via the 2026 Review Conference final document.

a dual purpose: expanding support – both discursive and practical – for these initiatives beyond the TPNW’s membership, while simultaneously bridging divides between TPNW proponents and skeptics within the NPT.

Notably, even some NPT states parties skeptical of the TPNW have expressed principled support for victim assistance and environmental remediation – as evidenced in their statements at the 2024 NPT PrepCom and

working papers. This pragmatic engagement was exemplified during the 2024 PrepCom, where a representative of Norway emphasized that humanitarian issues demand universal participation, “TPNW party or not”^{XVI}. The intervention framed victim assistance and environmental remediation measures as concrete, apolitical steps that all states could support²⁸. Germany also re-emphasized its interest in and active support of “concrete project work on victims’ assistance and environmental remediation”²⁹. It stressed that “victims’ assistance and environmental remediation from the long-term damages of nuclear testing likewise deserve broader attention and engagement”³⁰.

Beyond individual state positions, broader NPT groupings have also embraced the agenda. In its 2024 NPT PrepCom working paper, the Stockholm Initiative calls all NPT states parties to:

- to assist in building and disseminating knowledge and understanding of the catastrophic consequences of the use and testing of nuclear weapons and their impact on victims and on the environment, with a particular view to the gendered impact on humans;
- to encourage visits to affected communities, including Hiroshima and Nagasaki and former nuclear test sites such as Semipalatinsk and those in the Pacific as well as interaction with affected people, including the survivors of nuclear attacks (Hibakushas);
- to take note of the resolution 78/240 of the General Assembly “Addressing the legacy of nuclear weapons: providing victim assistance and environmental remediation to Member States affected by the use or testing of nuclear weapons” co-sponsored by Kazakhstan and Kiribati.³¹

These proposals emphasize the importance of awareness-raising, education³² and research on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons as well as support for concrete initiatives addressing their lasting legacy such as victim assistance and environmental remediation.

While cross-group initiatives like the Stockholm Initiative have pretty consistently advocated for engagement on the issues, including under the NPT, it is logical that

TPNW states parties — particularly those affected by nuclear weapons such as Kazakhstan, Kiribati and the Marshall Islands — would take a leading role. At the NPT 2024 PrepCom, these states jointly identified areas of possible engagement on the issues. (The proposals are presented in ascending order of their political sensitivity from the perspective of nuclear-weapon states, moving from areas of potential common ground to those likely to face stronger opposition):

- to advocate for references to nuclear justice and the aforementioned recommendations in the Chair’s factual summary^{XVII};
- to initiate discussions on victim assistance and environmental remediation with the nuclear-weapon states “in line with, but not limited to resolution 78/240” and to pledge to provide access to scientific information related to the humanitarian and environmental impacts of the nuclear tests;
- to frame humanitarian agenda-related discussions within the context of art. VI “and can further address them in any other business at the Preparatory Commission”³³.

Advocating for references to nuclear justice in the Chair’s factual summary looks as the least problematic option. While NWS may not wholeheartedly endorse such language, it is unlikely to damage the process. Even if tolerated reluctantly, these references will help to preserve the NPT’s role as a norm-building forum.

Discussions on internationally coordinated victim assistance and environmental remediation face steeper hurdles. NWS reactions will vary case-by-case, but common opposition is probable — especially to victim assistance — given sensitivities around legal liability and precedent. In any case, cooperation on any issue could be acceptable for NWS if framed as voluntary, not obligation-based. Requests for scientific data on test impacts — especially data that is relevant to environmental remediation — may gain limited traction, depending on the state. This falls under substantive challenges. Beyond substantive sensitivities, the choice of format for advancing these proposals is also important.

However, the critical question emerges: is the NPT the

^{XVI} Norway has maintained a long-standing, if non-linear, engagement with the humanitarian impacts agenda. It has directly and indirectly supported multiple initiatives addressing the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons globally. Norway voted in favor of the First Committee resolution on the Legacy of Nuclear Weapons co-sponsored by Kazakhstan and Kiribati during both the 2023 and 2024 First Committee sessions. Its participation in the TPNW process has been selective, though. It observed the First and Second MSPs but not the Third.

^{XVII} The references were incorporated into the summary. See Chair’s Summary, p. 6, https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/prepcom24/documents/WP44_.pdf.

appropriate forum to address victim assistance and environmental remediation? The absence of explicit provisions for nuclear-justice related issues in the treaty text does not inherently preclude their legitimate inclusion in the NPT's political and discursive sphere, even without a formal institutionalization. The NPT's normative framework extends beyond the initial legal agreement alone and encompasses decisions and precedents established through the review process. That said, substantive resolution of specific victim assistance and environmental remediation issues may ultimately require bilateral settings (between affected NNWS and NWS responsible for it). Even if bilateral agreements are among the primary vehicles to advance victim assistance and environmental remediation, the NPT review process institutionalizes multilateral support for such efforts. Similarly, though arms control is pursued bilaterally, the NPT review process provides a multilateral framework to reinforce these efforts.^{XVIII}

The tension emerges in the proposal to frame victim assistance within art. VI's disarmament context — a linkage that risks alienating NWS. By explicitly tying humanitarian concerns to nuclear disarmament obligations, such an approach merges two of the NWS' most contentious issues: disarmament and nuclear justice. Though individual NWS exhibit varying tolerance levels for each topic separately, their forced conjunction may be perceived not as a natural progression, but as an artificial fusion

of distinct irritants, potentially hardening resistance to both.

This skepticism is not merely theoretical as NWS states have already articulated their categorical rejection of such linkages. During the 2024 First Committee vote on the resolution on the Legacy of Nuclear Weapons, the US explicitly contested the very premise of connecting victim assistance to NPT pillars, stating that it disagrees with the position that proposed calls to consider victim assistance or environmental remediation would address any of the NPT's three pillars. More pointedly, the US denounced the notion that remediation constitutes “a meaningful step to nuclear disarmament”^{XIX} a position echoed, if less vocally, by other NWS. Despite opposition from NWS, the humanitarian imperative demands continued exploration of viable pathways forward. Oliver Meier's proposal for a “coalition of the willing” to advance victim assistance within the NPT deserves exploration³⁴.

Its design would need to be carefully calibrated in relation to both the TPNW's emerging mechanisms and existing First Committee initiatives, ensuring any new framework strengthens rather than fragments the growing normative architecture for nuclear justice. Among useful models worth exploring are both the more formal, treaty-mandated International Support Network for Victims of Chemical Weapons^{XX} and less formalized

XVIII France explained that it was unable to support the First Committee resolution L.74 “Addressing the legacy of nuclear weapons” for a number of reasons, among which is that it “aims to establish an international liability regime that disregards ongoing bilateral or national efforts”. See Explanation of Vote, After the vote, Presented by Camille Petit, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of France to the Conference on Disarmament, 79th session of the United Nations General Assembly, First Committee, Nuclear weapons, New York, November 2024, p. 3, https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/1com/1com24/eov/L74_France.pdf. In the explanation of vote on L.74 the US, in their turn, stressed that they have provided large amounts of assistance through other mechanisms and are not aware that any assistance has been provided through international mechanisms such as the TPNW. See Explanation of vote, After the vote, (Written form for the record), Submitted by the United States of America, Cluster I – Nuclear Weapons, 79th session of the United Nations General Assembly, First Committee, New York, November 8, 2024, p. 2, https://estatemnts.unmeetings.org/estatemnts/11.0010/20241108100000000/pPKzpsMjg/DhEwxpqwAt_nyc_en.pdf. To be fair, TPNW's framework for victim assistance and environmental remediation is yet to be fully established, meaning no mechanism existed to provide assistance.

XIX Explanation of the vote [on L.74 “Addressing the legacy of nuclear weapons: providing victim assistance and environmental remediation to Member States affected by the use or testing of nuclear weapons”], After the vote (Written form for the record), Submitted by the United States of America, 79th session of the United Nations General Assembly, First Committee, Cluster I – Nuclear Weapons, New York, November 8, 2024, p. 2, https://estatemnts.unmeetings.org/estatemnts/11.0010/20241108100000000/pPKzpsMjg/DhEwxpqwAt_nyc_en.pdf.

XX The International Support Network for Victims of Chemical Weapons, established in 2011 with its dedicated trust fund, provides a mechanism addressing both immediate needs and long-term institutional memory through, inter alia, bringing visibility and awareness of the history of chemical warfare and its impacts. For more, see OPCW, “Supporting Victims of Chemical Weapons”, <https://www.opcw.org/our-work/>

donor-driven frameworks that prioritize discreet coordination among donors, focusing on technical cooperation and aligned funding priorities rather than institutional visibility or public outreach. When anchored in the principle of “security for all”, such efforts could help translate moral imperatives into practical action—enabling even states without historical responsibility to contribute through flexible, non-bureaucratic frameworks that prioritize tangible support.

Policy Recommendations

This paper offers three policy recommendations in the victim assistance and environmental remediation cluster.

Recommendation 1: Humanitarian-aligned states and all other NPT parties as well as NGOs should:

- continue raising the issues of humanitarian consequences and nuclear justice in all relevant forums, including the NPT. Sustaining this discourse is critical not only for embedding these norms into the institutional fabric of nuclear weapons debates and advancing a more holistic approach to these weapons that aligns with the principle of “security for all” and serves the interests of humanity. It also institutionalizes multilateral support — both discursive and practical — for such efforts
- translate normative shifts into tangible action, discursive efforts must be paired with concrete, workable initiatives, such as integrating disarmament education into academic and diplomatic training

programs, with emphasis on humanitarian impacts and nuclear justice.

Recommendation 2: Humanitarian-aligned states and parties to both the NPT and TPNW should:

- explore the possibility to establish a “coalition of the willing” within the NPT framework to advance victim assistance, translating moral imperatives into practical action
- take into consideration the TPNW’s emerging mechanisms and existing First Committee initiatives and build on the experience of the existing models, both formal and informal, such as the International Support Network for Victims of Chemical Weapons and less formalized donor-driven frameworks that prioritize discreet coordination among donors.

Recommendation 3: NWS and NPT parties affected by nuclear weapons use and testing should:

- respond constructively to legitimate calls for cooperation from affected states, moving beyond risk-averse approaches that prioritize liability avoidance over meaningful engagement.
- approach such cooperation through pragmatically flexible formats — including bilateral engagement alongside multilateral mechanisms — while grounding efforts in the principles of good-faith engagement and precedent-smart cooperation (framing collaboration as humanitarian and scientific rather than legal redress).

CONCLUSION

While humanitarian-centered approaches to nuclear weapons — addressing their risks, dangers and consequences — are gradually gaining visibility in NPT proceedings, their institutionalization remains uneven, hindered by resistance from NWS and wariness among nuclear-allied NNWS. At the same time, a comprehensive understanding of nuclear risks underscores the urgency of preventive measures, while the ongoing suffering of victims and environmental damage concretizes the catastrophic consequences of inaction. By addressing future potential harm prospectively (through risk reduction) and existing harm retrospectively (through victim assistance and environmental remediation), this paper argues for an integrated approach — one where lessons from past suffering reinforce the moral and practical imperative to prevent its reoccurrence in the future.

To make meaningful progress, the NPT community must transcend the current framing of humanitarian issues as ideological battlegrounds. Skeptics, in particular, should evolve beyond risk-averse approaches that emphasize avoidance, and instead engage constructively with affected states and those concerned about potential future consequences. This requires a shift toward solution-oriented dialogue — on both victim assistance and environmental remediation as well as comprehensive risk reduction — that bridges normative discourse with tangible, actionable measures. The path forward demands both principled vision and pragmatism: advancing humanitarian principles while maintaining dialogue with skeptics, and ensuring that the NPT does serve humanity’s interests — an area where the treaty has both the potential and responsibility to achieve more.

supporting-victims-chemical-weapons.

ENDNOTES

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- 6 Report of the coordinator of the consultative process on security concerns, p. 9.
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- 9 VCDNP, “Security Risks Emanating from Nuclear Weapons – A TPNW Perspective [webinar]”, March 31, 2025, <https://vcdnp.org/security-risks-nuclear-weapons-tpnw/>.
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- 14 Report of the coordinator of the consultative process on security concerns, p. 14.
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- 18 “Stepping up efforts: towards a successful review cycle”, Working paper submitted by the members of the Stockholm Initiative for Nuclear Disarmament (Argentina, Canada, Ethiopia, Finland, Germany, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Norway, Republic of Korea, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland), 28 May 2024, <https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/prepcom24/documents/WP13.pdf>
- 19 VCDNP, “Security Risks Emanating from Nuclear Weapons – A TPNW Perspective [webinar]”, March 31, 2025, <https://vcdnp.org/security-risks-nuclear-weapons-tpnw/>.
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- 25 Joint statement on behalf of Ireland and New Zealand introducing draft resolution L.39, p. 4.
- 26 Statement by Mirjana Spoljaric President, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, 2024 session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2026 Review Conference, Geneva, 22 July – 2 August 2024, [delivered 24 July 2024], p. 2, https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/prepcom24/statements/24July_ICRC.pdf.
- 27 “Advancing complementarity of the TPNW with other disarmament and non-proliferation treaties, focusing on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons [side event]”, 22 July 2024, https://x.com/jmc_nonukes/status/1813848574087561263.
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- 30 Cluster 1: Statement by the Federal Republic of Germany, Delivered by Head of Delegation, Ambassador Susanne Riegraf, 25 July 2024, p. 4, https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/prepcom24/statements/25July_Germany.pdf.
- 31 “Stepping up efforts: towards a successful review cycle”, Working paper submitted by the members of the Stockholm Initiative for Nuclear Disarmament (Argentina, Canada, Ethiopia, Finland, Germany, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Norway, Republic of Korea, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland), 28 May 2024, <https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/prepcom24/documents/WP13.pdf> P.4-5
- 32 Nuclear non-proliferation education has traditionally been an area of broad consensus within the NPT framework. However, some states—notably Japan, the leading driver of this agenda (a theme both the Stockholm Initiative and NPDI, where Japan participates, echo)—have taken especially active roles, shifting the focus beyond non-proliferation to include disarmament education, underscored by awareness of humanitarian consequences. As Japan’s working paper to the 2024 NPT PrepCom emphasizes, such education efforts must be underpinned by the awareness of the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of the use of nuclear weapons. See “Disarmament and non-proliferation education”, Working paper submitted by Japan, 20 May 2024, p. 1, <https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/prepcom24/documents/WP3.pdf>. The working paper submitted to the 2025 PrepCom by the NPDI—under the same title—builds on Japan’s 2024 text, expanding its humanitarian framing. It not only reiterates the need for public awareness of disarmament, non-proliferation and associated risks but also stresses the importance of: a) seeking the most effective ways to raise public awareness, including about the risks posed by nuclear weapons; b) supporting scientific evidence and studies of impacts, including personal testimonies from those affected by nuclear weapon use and testing; and c) incorporating broader perspectives in disarmament education, particularly its humanitarian aspects, as well as the relationship between security and disarmament. See “Disarmament and non-proliferation education”, Working paper submitted by the members of the Non-Proliferation Philippines, Poland, Türkiye and the United Arab Emirates), 11 April 2025, p. 1, <https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/prepcom25/documents/WP32.pdf>. Japan is nuclear-allied and selectively humanitarian-aligned with its unique focus on survivor narratives and education. Its overall engagement with the broader humanitarian disarmament agenda, though, has been more restrained compared to states like Norway or Australia. It did vote in favor of the First Committee resolution on the Legacy of Nuclear Weapons, though. It has been consistently voting in favor of the First Committee resolution on Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons and its predecessor, the resolution on Taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations.
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Cover Image: Fumio Kishida delivered a speech at 2022 NPT Review Conference; owned by the Prime Minister’s Office of Japan. (https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/101_kishida/actions/202208/01usa.html)



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About Deep Cuts

For years, more and more arms control treaties have been eroding and nuclear disarmament is in a deep crisis. The goal of this research and transfer project is to analyze obstacles to U.S.-Russian nuclear and conventional arms control, to strengthen European security and to develop concrete risk-reduction measures that limit the potential for military escalation in the short term and aim to cut nuclear stockpiles in the long term. The Young Deep Cuts Commission is part of the Challenges to Deep Cuts Project which was established in 2013 and is coordinated by IFSH. The project partner is the independent Arms Control Association in Washington, D.C

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