

Nuclear risk reduction and the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons

Amendments submitted by Christine Muttonen - Delegation of Austria -
for the Draft Resolution of the General Committee on Political Affairs and Security of the
Parliamentary Assembly of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe

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Including a background explanation

Amendments:

New pre-ambular paragraphs

1) after para 9:

Expressing deep concern at increased nuclear threats arising from the deteriorating relationship between Russia and NATO, including potential violations of the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, statements indicating an increased readiness to use nuclear weapons, and statements indicating potential plans to deploy nuclear weapons to additional territories in Europe.

2) After para 16:

Welcoming the 'Humanitarian Pledge', initiated by Austria and endorsed by over 100 governments, that notes the catastrophic humanitarian consequences that would result from any use of nuclear weapons and commits to 'filling the legal gap' for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons.

New Operative paragraphs:

1) After para 25

Calls on all OSCE States with nuclear weapons or under extended nuclear deterrence relationships to reduce the risks of a nuclear war by taking nuclear weapons off high-alert, and by adopting no-first use policies;

2) After the para above

Calls on all participating OSCE States to cooperate in 'filling the legal gap to prohibit and eliminate nuclear weapons', by supporting United Nations facilitated deliberations and negotiations for multilateral nuclear disarmament, commencing with the renewal by the UN General Assembly of the Open Ended Working Group on Multilateral Nuclear Disarmament Negotiations.

Explanation:

The Ukraine conflict and the deteriorating relationship between Russia & NATO - and Russia & the European Union – has put a stop to the nuclear détente that developed at the end of the Cold War, increased the level of nuclear brinkmanship in the European theatre, stimulated proposals for forward deployment of nuclear weapons, and elevated the risks of nuclear weapons use by accident or miscalculation.

There are 16,000 nuclear weapons remaining in the arsenals of the nuclear-armed States, the majority of them possessed by US and Russia. Nearly 1800 of these are primed and ready to be fired within minutes under launch-on-warning policies. In addition, neither Russia nor NATO have committed to not using nuclear weapons first in a conflict – increasing the tensions between these two military power blocs.

There have already been at least 15 times when a nuclear exchange nearly occurred through conflict escalation, miscommunications, and/or faulty information in the nuclear command and control systems.

Recent research on nuclear command and control systems indicates that there is an additional risk of cyberattack by a terrorist organisation or other third party which could trigger an inadvertent nuclear exchange.

The Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty, adopted by the USA and USSR in 1987, was a very important step in reducing nuclear dangers in Europe by eliminating a whole class of nuclear weapons that could reach their targets in a very short time and could have been used in war-fighting. Confidence in the INF has eroded recently with allegations that Russia is violating the INF by flight testing missiles that fall within the ranges prohibited by the INF. On the other hand, Russia has continued to express opposition to US tactical nuclear weapons forward deployed in NATO territories. Such deployment is not prohibited by the INF, but poses a threat from nuclear weapons within close range to Russia.

The US and Russia had agreed at the 2010 Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to accelerate nuclear disarmament steps, including those related to tactical nuclear weapons. However, the increased tensions between Russia and the West have prevented progress on this, and even led to statements from both sides indicating consideration of possible deployment of nuclear weapons in additional territories in Europe.

This, along with differences over the proposal for a UN Conference to establish a Middle East Zone free from Nuclear Weapons and other Weapons of Mass Destruction, led to a collapse of the 2015 NPT Review Conference in May 2015.

In the meantime, there has been increased concern over the risks and consequences of the potential use of nuclear weapons. The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists in January 2015 moved the 'Doomsday Clock' to 3 minutes to Midnight – the closest it has been since the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Over 150 countries have endorsed a statement expressing concern about the risks and catastrophic humanitarian consequences of the use of nuclear weapons. Over 100 of these countries have also signed a pledge, initiated by Austria, to 'identify and pursue effective measures to fill the legal gap for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons and ... to cooperate with all stakeholders to achieve this goal.'

In the final draft outcome document of the 2015 NPT Review Conference, States Parties to the NPT had provisionally agreed to fill this legal gap by calling on the UN General Assembly in October 2015 to 'establish at its seventieth session (October 2015) an open-ended working group to identify and elaborate effective measures to ... achieve a nuclear weapon free world,' and 'to encourage all States to engage in this open and inclusive process.'

The call for an open ended working group (OEWG) arose out of frustration at the inability of the Conference on Disarmament (CD) to commence negotiations on any nuclear disarmament measure for nearly two decades. The CD, established by the UN during the Cold War era, is hampered by a consensus rule allowing any country to block progress, and by the fact that less than 1/3 of countries are members. A UN OEWG, on the other hand, would be open to every country and would not have to be bound by consensus.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, in its Istanbul Declaration in 2013, supported a UN OEWG which ran for one year and successfully identified legal and political options for the achievement of a nuclear weapon free world. An OEWG established by the UN General Assembly this year could further develop on this work preparing the ground for multilateral negotiations.