



International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War's Statement to the Third
Preparatory Committee for the 2026 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on
the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

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Distinguished delegates, esteemed colleagues, and honored guests,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I am not a diplomat. I am an Emergency Room doctor who has spent the last 50 years speaking with patients and their families. So let me talk to you now as I would to the family of a critically ill patient.

Because that is the situation we face. The world, for which we are collectively responsible, is in terrible danger. Nine countries, five of them parties to this Treaty, have chosen to build arsenals of nuclear weapons that effectively hold all of humanity, including their own citizens, hostage. They want these weapons because they make them strong and allow them to bully the rest of the world. They justify these weapons with the illusion that they offer security. That is a dangerous lie. These weapons are the greatest threat to our survival and pose an existential threat to civilization.

Like the chronic smoker who lives in denial about the risk of developing lung cancer, we have largely convinced ourselves that nuclear war will never happen. The truth is, we are closer to a nuclear war today than we have ever been and, yet, we go about our daily life as though this sword of Damocles were not hanging over us.

Studies show that a large-scale nuclear war between the United States and Russia, who together possess nearly 90% of the world's nuclear weapons, would end life as we know it. Most of this city, including this very building we are sitting in, would be vaporized and 12 to 15 million people would simply disappear. Across both countries, an estimated 200-300 million people would be killed in the first half hour. Survivors would be left in a radioactive waste field with no electric grid, no internet, no cell phones, no health care, no food distribution system, no banking system, and no system for maintaining law and order. In the following months, most of those who initially



survived would die—from radiation poisoning, epidemic disease, exposure, and starvation.

But this is only part of the story. The impacts of this war would ripple far beyond the borders of the US and Russia. The enormous fires that consumed the cities of Russia and America would loft millions of tons of soot into the upper atmosphere, blocking out the sun and causing global temperatures to plummet by an average of 10 degrees C. In the interior regions of North America and Eurasia temperatures would drop 25 to 30 degrees C. We have not seen temperatures that cold since the last Ice Age.

Under these conditions, ecosystems that have evolved since the end of that Ice Age will collapse; food production will stop and, according to [a landmark study published in 2022](#), 6 billion people, three quarters of humanity, will starve in the first two years. The study stopped at 2 years. The famine would not, and we do not know what the ultimate death toll will be. That same study showed that a much smaller-scale war, such as one between India and Pakistan, will cause enough climate disruption to trigger a famine that will kill a quarter of humanity—2 billion people globally in the first 2 years.

The nuclear powers assure us that this will never happen — that deterrence will prevent nuclear weapons from ever being used. They push this myth even as they threaten to use these very weapons.

But the truth is that nuclear weapons do not possess some magical power that guarantees they will never be used. In fact, there have been numerous incidents throughout the nuclear weapons era when we have come within minutes of the holocaust I have just described. We have not survived because deterrence works, because our leaders have been all wise, our military policies and doctrines sound and our technology perfect. We have survived, to use the words of former US Defense Secretary Robert Mcnamara, because, “We lucked out...It was luck that prevented nuclear war.”

Five of the nine nuclear powers have a binding obligation under Article VI of this Treaty to engage in good faith negotiations for the elimination of nuclear weapons. Yet they have ignored this obligation for nearly 6 decades. The US and Russia have actually gone further by abandoning every nuclear arms control agreement except for New START, and that will expire next February. These failures, taken together with the



destabilizing and deadly wars in Ukraine and Gaza, are causing some non-nuclear parties to the NPT to seek access to nuclear weapons.

When 121 non nuclear nations came together to uphold Article VI and negotiated the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), the nuclear armed states chose not to join that historic effort but to boycott the negotiations and do everything they could to undermine the new Treaty using the bizarre claim, straight out of 1984's Ministry of Truth, that the TPNW "undermined" the NPT. This review conference needs to call out their horrific failure to honor their Article VI obligations. The N-9 should address any concerns with the TPNW by meaningfully engaging with States Parties and joining the Treaty's official proceedings.

They must come together, agree to a detailed timetable to eliminate their nuclear arsenals, adhere to the TPNW's provisions, and join the Treaty at the earliest possible date.

The world is at a crossroads. We have before us the choice of life or death. Do not let the nuclear armed states lead us down the path to death.