



**The Next Generation Forum at the Tenth NPT Review Conference 2021:
Advancing the 'Youth, Non-Proliferation and Disarmament' Agenda**

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Emerging Voices Network Members,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to have been invited to speak today and to help bring to a close what I understand has been a highly successful plenary.

I want to thank you all, not only for your efforts today, but for your enduring commitment to our shared cause of a world free of nuclear weapons. The pursuit of nuclear disarmament is not an easy task. It suffers frequent setbacks and can be a frustrating and, at times, disappointing endeavour.

Nonetheless, it is a goal worth striving for and one that requires the passion and dedication on display today. For that, you have my sincere appreciation.

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons is by no means a perfect instrument. It is, however, the so-called “cornerstone” of the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation for three important reasons.

First, it contains legally binding disarmament commitments on all its States Parties, including the five nuclear-weapon States.

Second, it contains verifiable non-proliferation obligations policed by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

And third, its near-universal membership means that these commitments and obligations are binding on the vast majority of the international community.

For these reasons, the NPT is not only the cornerstone of the regime, but part of the bedrock of international peace and security.

In just over half a century, the Treaty has achieved some important successes and proven itself to be remarkably adaptable. Following its indefinite extension in 1995, the NPT has evolved into to the de facto forum for the solidification of norms against the use and proliferation of nuclear weapons and the quest for their elimination.

But like all instruments, it requires constant tending to ensure it remains fit for purpose and able to confront the nuclear weapons challenges of our current context.

I think we can all agree that the tectonic plates of the nuclear landscape are shifting.

As has no doubt been discussed today, a variety of factors are driving nuclear risks to levels not seen in decades. These include the increasingly hostile relationships between nuclear-weapon States, categorized by heated rhetoric and the absence of dialogue. In parallel, the arms control regime has dwindled to a single treaty, while all States possessing nuclear weapons are engaged in campaigns to qualitatively improve their nuclear arsenals and, in some cases, expand them.

And these developments are taking place at a time when technological advances are changing the face of warfare and exposing new vulnerabilities in our interlinked societies. These vulnerabilities are particularly acute in nuclear command and control structures, as developments in cyber and outer space have enhanced the ability to spoof, hack or otherwise interfere with those structures.

In such an environment, as I have said many times before, the prospects of miscalculation and misinterpretation are unacceptably high. Without a course correction, I fear we may be headed down the path to catastrophe.

The NPT Review Conference will not be a panacea for all of our nuclear concerns. But it does offer an opportunity to begin that course correction. It is a chance to press pause, to assess the current context and reach mutually agreeable steps for reducing nuclear risk and getting the world back on the path to the elimination of nuclear weapons.

Of course, this is easier said than done. Divisions between nuclear-weapon States, within non-nuclear weapon States and between both NWS and NNWS run deep. Overcoming them will require patience, a willingness to listen, the desire to compromise and a commitment to negotiation. In the face of nuclear disaster, the refusal to budge from strict national positions does not improve the security of anyone, not least the states in question.

As I see it, this Review Conference is a chance for all States Parties to achieve multiple key outcomes.

First, a reaffirmation of support for the goals of the NPT, including the pursuit of a world free of nuclear weapons.

Second, a recommitment to the norms of the non-use, proliferation and testing of nuclear weapons.

Third, a reaffirmation of the commitments undertaken as States Parties to the Treaty, not least the unequivocal undertaking for the total elimination of nuclear arsenals.

Fourth, the development of a package of measures to reduce the risk of nuclear war that can also act as springboards for practical steps in disarmament – including further reductions in nuclear arsenals.

Fifth, consideration and recognition of the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons.

Sixth, agreement to strengthen the non-proliferation regime in the face of burgeoning proliferation drivers such as technological developments or regional hostilities.

Seventh, agreement to support all initiatives to resolve regional proliferation crises such as those persisting in Asia and the Middle East.

Eighth and finally, consideration of how disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation will need to adapt to address issues such as: the nexus between new technology, new domains and nuclear weapons, the inclusion of all types of nuclear weapons, how to address missile defence systems and how to move beyond bilateral arms control to involve other NWS.

I understand that many of these issues have been on your agendas for today – especially in your various working groups. I look forward to learning about not only the issues your network considers to be of the highest priority for the Review Conference, but also what solutions you propose for overcoming challenges and what ideas you have to take advantage of new opportunities.

I would like to reiterate something I said when I last spoke to this Network. That is, those of us in the policy-making community do not seek the views of you and your generation simply as a box-checking exercise or for diversity's sake.

We do so for two reasons. First, it is disappointing but highly likely that the elimination of nuclear weapons is a mantle your generation will need to wear. We can hope that the world will see the light, but just as with climate change, the planet you inherit may still be full of nuclear danger.

Second, and in my opinion more importantly, we do so because of the fresh perspective you provide. This network is full of young professionals who have studied these issues and are intimately familiar with their nuances. In a rapidly evolving world, one based on technological acceleration, you have unique insights that need to be considered.

At the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs, we remain committed to creating space for youth and to working with youth. Recognizing the importance of young women and men to bring about change, we launched our youth outreach initiative, “#Youth4Disarmament” or Y4D, in 2019.

Through an array of activities, the initiative strives to engage, educate and empower young people with the aim of facilitating their meaningful participation in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation.

We do so to enable inclusion, to build platforms, and to ensure collaboration. Our efforts aim to forge a community that will thrive with an ever-increasing

youth participation. I am hopeful that today's event will further build and develop these collaborative partnerships.

A combination of educational, creative and action-oriented practices provided by the Y4D initiative invites young people of all backgrounds, interests and expertise to meaningfully participate in and contribute to "Securing Our Common Future".

Through the initiative, UNODA will continue to connect geographically diverse young people with experts to learn about current international security challenges, the work of the United Nations and how to participate actively.

Please accept my congratulations on today's event. I hope it is one of many. Please also rest assured that we at the United Nations will continue working on your behalf to ensure that leaders and policymakers around the world will hear your voices.

I thank you very much for your attention.