

THE SECRETARY GENERAL - UNITED NATIONS
REMARKS TO THE TENTH REVIEW CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE
TREATY ON THE NON-PROLIFERATION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

1 August 2022

[Bilingual, as delivered]

Your Excellency, Ambassador Zlauvinen,

Congratulations on your election as President of the Conference.

You have my full support in the task ahead of us.

Excellencies. Delegates. Ladies and gentlemen.

This Conference has been long-delayed.

But its importance and urgency remain undiminished.

It takes place at a critical juncture for our collective peace and security.

The climate crisis, stark inequalities, conflicts and human rights violations, and the personal and economic devastation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, have put our world under greater stress than it has faced in our lifetimes.

And it occurs at a time of nuclear danger not seen since the height of the Cold War. That is the reason that to [underscore] the importance of this conference, I will be in a few days in Hiroshima at the anniversary of the first nuclear bombardment in human history. And then I will follow it with two visits to other countries in the region having non-proliferation as a key item in the agenda of the visits.

Now, the initial post-Cold War period ushered in a tentative new hope for peace.

A hope found in massive arsenal reductions, in entire regions declaring themselves to be nuclear-weapons-free, and in the entrenchment of norms against the use, proliferation and testing of nuclear weapons.

When I was Prime Minister of Portugal, I instructed our mission to the United Nations to vote — for the first time — against the resumption of nuclear testing in the Pacific. Before, the tradition of my country was to abstain, as if this was a matter in which we can abstain.

And through a combination of commitment, judgment and luck, the world avoided the suicidal mistake of nuclear conflict.

But as the years have passed, these fruits of hope are withering.

Humanity is in danger of forgetting the lessons forged in the terrifying fires of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Geopolitical tensions are reaching new highs.

Competition is trumping co-operation and collaboration.

Distrust has replaced dialogue and disunity has replaced disarmament.

States are seeking false security in stockpiling and spending hundreds of billions of dollars on doomsday weapons that have no place on our planet.

Almost 13,000 nuclear weapons are now being held in arsenals around the world.

All this at a time when the risks of proliferation are growing and guardrails to prevent escalation are weakening.

And when crises — with nuclear undertones — are festering.

From the Middle East and the Korean Peninsula.

To the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, and to many other factors around the world.

Excellencies,

The clouds that parted following the end of the Cold War are gathering once more.

We have been extraordinarily lucky so far. But luck is not a strategy.

Nor is it a shield from geopolitical tensions boiling over into nuclear conflict.

Today, humanity is just one misunderstanding, one miscalculation away from nuclear annihilation.

We need the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons as much as ever.

That is why this Review Conference is so important.

It's an opportunity to hammer-out the measures that will help avoid certain disaster.

And to put humanity on a new path towards a world free of nuclear weapons.

It's also a chance to strengthen this Treaty and make it fit for the worrying world around us.

I suggest five areas for action.

First — we urgently need to reinforce and reaffirm the 77-year-old norm against the use of nuclear weapons.

This requires a steadfast commitment from all States Parties.

It means finding practical measures that will reduce the risk of nuclear war and put us back on the path to disarmament.

We need to strengthen all avenues of dialogue and transparency.

Peace cannot take hold in an absence of trust and mutual respect.

Second — reducing the risk of war is not enough.

Eliminating nuclear weapons is the only guarantee they will never be used.

We must work relentlessly towards this goal.

This must start with new commitments to shrink the numbers of all kinds of nuclear weapons so that they no longer hang by a thread over humanity.

And it means reinvigorating — and fully resourcing — our multilateral agreements and frameworks around disarmament and non-proliferation, including the important work of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Troisièmement, nous devons nous attaquer aux tensions qui couvent au Moyen-Orient et en Asie.

La persistance des conflits, conjuguée à la menace des armes nucléaires, rapproche ces régions de la catastrophe.

Nous devons redoubler nos efforts en faveur du dialogue et de la négociation pour apaiser les tensions et tisser de nouveaux liens de confiance, dans des régions qui en ont connu trop peu.

Quatrièmement, nous devons promouvoir l'usage pacifique des technologies nucléaires — notamment à des fins médicales et autres — pour accélérer la réalisation des Objectifs de développement durable.

Utilisé à des fins pacifiques, le nucléaire peut être très bénéfique pour l'humanité.

Cinquièmement enfin, nous devons remplir tous les engagements restants pris dans le Traité, et veiller à ce que le texte demeure à jour et adapté à ces temps difficiles.

Si nous sommes tous réunis ici aujourd'hui, c'est parce que nous avons foi dans l'objet et le but du Traité.

Mais, si l'on veut assurer la pérennité du texte dans l'avenir, il nous faut dépasser le statu quo.

Il faut un engagement renouvelé ainsi que des négociations véritables et de bonne foi.

Et il faut que toutes les parties soient à l'écoute, consentent à des compromis et gardent en permanence à l'esprit les enseignements du passé, mais aussi la fragilité de l'avenir.

Excellences,

Les générations futures comptent sur votre engagement pour nous écarter de l'abîme.

Il nous incombe à tous de laisser le monde dans un meilleur état, plus sûr, que celui dans lequel nous l'avons trouvé.

L'heure est venue de relever ce défi fondamental et de conjurer, une fois pour toutes, le spectre de l'anéantissement nucléaire.

Je vous remercie.

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[all-English]

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This must start with new commitments to shrink the numbers of all kinds of nuclear weapons so that they no longer hang by a thread over humanity.

And it means reinvigorating — and fully resourcing — our multilateral agreements and frameworks around disarmament and non-proliferation, including the important work of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Third — we need to address the simmering tensions in the Middle East and Asia.

By adding the threat of nuclear weapons to enduring conflicts, these regions are edging towards catastrophe.

We need to redouble our support for dialogue and negotiation to ease tensions and forge new bonds of trust in regions that have seen too little.

Fourth — we need to promote the peaceful use of nuclear technology as a catalyst to advance the Sustainable Development Goals, including for medical and other uses.

When used for peaceful purposes, this technology can be a great benefit to humanity.

And fifth — we need to fulfill all outstanding commitments in the Treaty itself, and keep it fit-for-purpose in these trying times.

We are all here today because we believe in the Treaty's purpose and function.

But carrying it into the future requires going beyond the status quo.

It requires renewed commitment, and real, good faith negotiations.

And it requires all Parties to listen, compromise and keep the lessons of the past — and the fragility of the future — in view at all times.

Excellencies,

Future generations are counting on your commitment to step back from the abyss.

We have a shared obligation to leave the world a better, safer place than we found it.

This is our moment to meet this basic test, and lift the cloud of nuclear annihilation, once and for all.

Thank you.