

### Background

The 1970 Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) is the backbone of the international regime to stop the spread of nuclear weapons. Today 189 countries are parties to the NPT, and the treaty's nonproliferation norms enjoy near-universal support.

Parties to the NPT are split into two categories—nuclear weapons states (NWS) and non-nuclear weapons states (NNWS). The recognized NWS are the United States, Russia, China, France and the United Kingdom. Only India, Pakistan and Israel have never signed the NPT, while North Korea withdrew from the treaty in 2003.



Every five years a review conference is held to determine compliance, past implementation and ways to strengthen the NPT. The 2005 Review Conference was an unbridled disaster, which undermined support for the nonproliferation regime. Success at the 2010 Review Conference, beginning 3 May, will be essential to strengthen efforts to halt the spread of nuclear weapons and advance nuclear disarmament.

### Purpose

The core of the NPT is a set of principles to stop proliferation and encourage disarmament:

- States with nuclear weapons commit to eliminating their arsenals, and agree to not spread nuclear weapons or the means to acquire them to other states.
- States without nuclear weapons promise not to seek or acquire them.
- In return, each state has the right to pursue and use peaceful nuclear technology.

The treaty also charges the IAEA with inspecting nuclear energy facilities, provides for safeguards for the transfer of sensitive nuclear materials and allows for the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones.

### Major Issues

A critical issue before the NPT is that states with nuclear weapons are criticized for ignoring their commitment to disarm, while non-weapons states are criticized for not doing enough to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and materials. To solve this, disarmament and nonproliferation should be seen as two sides of the same coin. If non-weapons states make progress on controlling proliferation, weapons states will feel more comfortable about reducing stockpiles. Reducing stockpiles will build the cooperation needed among non-weapons states to prevent the further spread of nuclear weapons. In this context, a follow-on START treaty, the entry into force of the CTBT and other disarmament agreements may be vital for the health of the NPT, as will further export controls and safety protocols.

Countries that possess nuclear weapons, but are not signatories to the NPT – India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea - create a difficult double standard. Exempt from the NPT's legal constructs, these states developed weapons programs with little punishment and are not required to accept IAEA safeguards, leaving nuclear facilities under-protected. Drawing these states into the NPT or a verification and safeguards regime is a serious political and legal challenge for the treaty and its parties.

North Korea recently demonstrated a weakness in the NPT when it withdrew from the treaty and conducted two nuclear tests. Efforts to punish these actions and convince North Korea to dismantle its program and return to the NPT have been unsuccessful. Making withdrawal from the treaty a more serious offense and deterring future proliferators is a priority for NPT parties.

Preventing proliferation while guaranteeing NPT parties' right to peaceful nuclear technology is another area of concern. Many countries are pursuing peaceful nuclear energy programs, but others – like Iran - may be developing weapons under the veil of the NPT's universal right to explore peaceful nuclear technology. Fortifying safeguards that prevent energy programs from becoming weapons programs will be an important initiative for parties to the NPT.