



ASIA-PACIFIC LEADERSHIP NETWORK

FOR NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION AND DISARMAMENT

URGENT TASKS FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

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Soon after the nuclear devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, people began seeking the abolition of nuclear weapons. In fact, the very first resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (January 1946) commissioned the UN Atomic Energy Commission to “make specific proposals ... for the elimination from national armaments of atomic weapons.” As we observe the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons on September 26, it is important to reflect on how far we have come—and how far we still have to go – in eliminating these catastrophic weapons.

Following the 1956 UNGA resolution, however, the world soon entered the Cold War era and moved in the opposite direction. At the height of the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union together possessed over 63,000 nuclear warheads. The end of the Cold War in 1991 reduced tensions between the East and the West, leading to significant reductions in nuclear arsenals. The latest New START Treaty (2011) limits the number of deployed nuclear warheads to 1,550 each for Russia and the United States.

New START, however, is set to expire in February 2026. The urgent task for the United States and Russia is to agree on a successor treaty that will further reduce the number of warheads. Given the difficult political relationship between the two countries, an important stopgap measure would be for Russia and the United States to agree not to exceed the New START limits even after the treaty expires. For the United States and Russia to agree on a significant further reduction, some kind of arrangement might be necessary to slow or limit China’s rapidly expanding nuclear arsenal.

Another urgent task is to bring the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) into force, a goal long overdue since its adoption in 1996. Recent movements and arguments in major nuclear-weapon states advocating for the resumption of nuclear testing make this task even more pressing. Even short of the treaty’s entry into force, countries should reaffirm or announce anew their nuclear test moratoria. This would build mutual confidence among nuclear-weapon countries and help reduce the pressure to resume testing.

A third urgent task is to move the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) forward. Adopted in 2017 and entering into force in 2021, the treaty has been ratified by 70 states – far short of the number needed to claim the treaty holds the power of customary international law that even non-signatory or non-ratifying states must respect. The urgent task now is to increase ratifications to a great majority of states worldwide. To this end, countries under extended nuclear deterrence, such as Japan, should not be discouraging other countries from signing or ratifying the treaty. Rather, Japan should be taking positive steps towards supporting the treaty, such as by participating in the meeting of states parties at least as an observer, and helping treaty members in areas like victim assistance and environmental remediation, where Japan can contribute its experience and expertise.

Countries should also continue to emphasise the horrific humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons, reminding nuclear-armed states of their responsibility to uphold international humanitarian law (IHL). Here, Japan can again play a crucial role by showing the world the horrific consequences experienced in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Countries should help strengthen the treaty's verification provisions rather than criticise them as shortcomings.

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) Review Conference is another venue where respect for international humanitarian law in all circumstances, particularly in relation to nuclear weapons use, should be emphasised. The 2010 NPT Review Conference Final Document, which highlighted “the need for all States at all times to comply with applicable international law, including IHL,” has to be reiterated and emphasized in every session. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) can also contribute to enforcing IHL by bringing violations to light through its international fact finding and inquiry missions.

Lastly, all those concerned about the horror of nuclear weapons and eager to work toward their elimination must join forces to maximise their efforts. The NPT Review Conferences provides an excellent opportunity, as many non-governmental organizations gather to voice their views. It is an opportunity to engage nuclear-weapon states, who are key participants of the Review Conferences. The International Commission on Nuclear Nonproliferation and Disarmament, active from 2008 through 2009, provided a valuable platform for such efforts. Today, organisations like the Asia-Pacific Leadership Network (APLN), its sister organisation, the European Leadership Network (ELN), or movements such as the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) continue to provide important venues for these activities.

The opinions articulated above represent the views of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Asia-Pacific Leadership Network or any of its members.

This commentary is also published on the [APLN website](#).

ABOUT APLN

The **Asia-Pacific Leadership Network for Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament (APLN)** is a Seoul-based organization and network of political, military, diplomatic leaders, and experts from across the Asia-Pacific region, working to address global security challenges, with a particular focus on reducing and eliminating nuclear weapons risks. The mission of APLN is to inform and stimulate debate, influence action, and propose policy recommendations designed to address regional security threats, with an emphasis on nuclear and other WMD (weapon of mass destruction) threats, and to do everything possible to achieve a world in which nuclear weapons and other WMDs are contained, diminished, and eventually eliminated.



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