



*Check against delivery*

**UN Security Council Briefing  
Nuclear Disarmament and Non-Proliferation  
18 March 2024**

*Statement by Gaukhar Mukhatzhanova  
Vienna Center for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation*

Madam President,  
Secretary-General Guterres,  
Ministers  
Executive Secretary Floyd,  
Distinguished Members of the Council,  
Excellencies,

It is a great honor to address the UN Security Council today on one of the most important and gravest issues facing humanity. I thank the Government of Japan and Foreign Minister Kamikawa for the invitation and for including a civil society representative in this briefing.

It is rare to have an NGO speaker at a meeting such as this, with nuclear weapons related fora traditionally inhospitable to formal non-governmental interventions. However, there is a growing recognition that inclusion of diverse stakeholders and perspectives in these discussions provides for a deeper, more holistic understanding of the nuclear weapons problem and improves our collective ability to develop better solutions.

Improving gender diversity in particular is also in line with the Member States commitments under the Women in Peace and Security resolutions. Beyond the improved numbers on women's participation, application of gender lens and feminist perspectives can help break the traditional conceptions of power and security associated with nuclear weapons and promote a more human-centred approach. I urge all Member States to actively facilitate greater inclusivity in multilateral fora, including the review process of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

Excellencies,

As Security Council members you receive briefings on many issues – difficult, gruesome, heartbreaking; you hear about wars and human rights violations, terrorist acts and genocide, arms trafficking and proliferation threats. But the briefing the Council has not received – and must never receive – is one on the

effects and consequences of a new use of nuclear weapons. A briefing that could tell of tens of thousands – or more – killed in the blasts; hundreds of thousands suffering and dying from radiation sickness, burns and other injuries; millions displaced and many, many more at risk of starvation due to the medium and longer term effects on climate, agricultural production and food markets around the world.

This scenario seems unthinkable, and yet today, the risk of nuclear weapon use is higher than it has been in decades, as the norm against the use – the *nuclear taboo* – is undermined by reckless rhetoric and threats, especially those issued in the context of an active military conflict. The NPT, the foundational instrument of the non-proliferation and disarmament regime, is under tremendous pressure. Nuclear- and non-nuclear-weapon States are divided over the lack of implementation of nuclear disarmament commitments, while modernization, and in some cases numerical growth, of arsenals sends a message of long-term reliance on nuclear weapons. The majority of UN Member States have rejected nuclear weapons by joining the NPT and nuclear-weapon-free zones and, more recently, by concluding the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. But we are now witnessing a recommitment to nuclear weapons, an increase in the value attached to them that challenges the norm against their pursuit and acquisition and contributes to proliferation pressures.

Furthermore, the divisions among the nuclear-weapon States are such that the actors whose cooperation is key to achieving outcomes and advancing the goals of the NPT are effectively not talking to each other. Throughout the Cold War the opposing superpowers were able to agree on the importance of non-proliferation and engagement on arms control, and work to secure the NPT. That is not the case today, and this is a fundamental challenge to the ability of States Parties to agree on a meaningful consensus outcome at the next Review Conference in 2026.

The nuclear-weapon States often cite difficult international security environment as reason not to proceed with nuclear disarmament. “The conditions are not right.” Fair enough, the situation is indeed dire. However, the five countries defined as nuclear-weapon States under the NPT are also the five permanent members of the Security Council, to whom the UN Charter entrusts the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. It is this responsibility I want to emphasize and appeal to today, for it is in your hands – more than anyone else’s – to make sure that the nuclear taboo holds, and that this Council and its future iterations never have to receive the kind of briefing I described earlier.

Nuclear risk has been on the mind of countless experts, policy makers and diplomats in recent years. There has been no shortage of proposals on steps and measures to implement. However, nuclear risk reduction discussions at the NPT review process meetings get bogged down in framing debates – is it a substitute for nuclear disarmament or its enabler, is it about strategic risks or any risks emanating from nuclear weapons? Important though these questions are, the 2026 Review Conference cannot spend days going over the same arguments. It would not be productive, and we can only hope it will not be too late.

The UN Security Council, specifically the five permanent members, should step up now. Recall how encouraging the Council action was in 1995, in the run up to the indefinite extension of the NPT. Then, the Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 984 on assurances against the use of nuclear weapons.

Ahead of the 11th Review Conference, the nuclear-weapon States should issue pledges – individually or collectively – on reducing the nuclear risks and formalize them through a UN Security Council resolution, similarly to the Resolution 984. Most importantly, the new resolution should clearly state that nuclear weapons must never be used again, under any circumstances. I further urge the nuclear-weapon States to include the following commitments:

- No increase in nuclear arsenals;
- No new weapon designs;
- No new deployments of weapons – at home or abroad, on Earth or in outer space;
- No nuclear testing;
- No threats to use nuclear weapons.

I realize this would be a tall order even in better times, not to mention today's circumstances, but precisely because of how high the stakes are, I call on you to approach it not from the place of balancing and bargaining, but from recognition of your responsibility as nuclear-weapon States and permanent members of the UN Security Council.

Accepting an Oscar for his portrayal of Robert Oppenheimer, Cillian Murphy said that “we’re all living in Oppenheimer’s world” and dedicated his award to the “peacemakers everywhere.” So if I may, to the UN Security Council members, and particularly the P5, I say: in the world of heightened nuclear threat, be the peacemakers.

Thank you.