

“No More Hiroshimas”: the Elders call for urgent nuclear dialogue as conflict risks rise

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The risk of nuclear catastrophe is higher than at any time since the Cold War. Leaders are failing to uphold international law, and eroding basic norms. We are regressing into a world in which the rule of law is being replaced by rule by power, with a destabilising new nuclear arms race.

We have come to Hiroshima to honour the victims of the atomic bombing in 1945. The upcoming 80th anniversary should compel all leaders to revitalise efforts towards nuclear disarmament. Instead, we are deeply concerned at the trivialisation of the use of nuclear weapons.

We reaffirm our support for full abolition of nuclear weapons. To reach this, we need a progressive global disarmament agenda based on four essential pillars: every nuclear-armed state should adopt a “no first use” doctrine, as many weapons as possible should be taken off high-alert status, a dramatic and urgent reduction in the number of weapons that are operationally deployed, and decreasing numbers to a maximum of 500 warheads each for the USA, Russia and China.

The recent fighting between India and Pakistan, two nuclear-armed states, underscores the terrifying risk of how quickly conflict can escalate to the point of a nuclear exchange.

President Putin’s contempt for the basic norms of state sovereignty and territorial integrity is driving a new arms race across Europe. Uncertainty around President Trump’s commitment to the USA’s traditional defence alliances is also accelerating rearmament.

Putting nuclear weapons at the heart of national defence perpetuates the dangerous myth that nuclear deterrence keeps us safe. Today’s weapons have a combined destructive capability of close to 100,000 Hiroshima or Nagasaki-sized bombs. One single bomb dropped in Hiroshima claimed around 140,000 victims by the end of 1945. Today’s collective arsenal has the capacity to destroy human civilisation.

Yet war and nuclear confrontation are not inevitable. The ongoing talks between the US and Iranian governments on Iran's nuclear programme could be a successful example of leaders pursuing political solutions over military confrontation.

We urge President Trump to follow through on negotiating nuclear reductions with Russia and China. The looming expiry of the New START agreement between Russia and the USA could leave a vacuum at the heart of non-proliferation efforts. Both countries must focus urgently on extending an agreement that is in both their interests.

All nuclear states should also enter into sustained high-level dialogue on placing guardrails on the role of Artificial Intelligence in weapons systems, focused on how to maintain meaningful human control.

In Hiroshima, we have heard again from survivors of the 1945 bombing, whose moving testimony of the intergenerational human suffering caused by these terrible weapons must never be forgotten. We have been inspired too by the commitment of young Japanese activists to the total eradication of nuclear weapons.

We encourage the Government of Japan to be a strong global voice to strengthen the taboo on using nuclear weapons. Engaging with the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) is one important way for Japan to use its unique moral authority, building on the leadership it showed when hosting the G7 in 2023.

All leaders must take meaningful steps to minimise nuclear risks, revitalise dialogue on arms control and de-escalate nuclear modernisation. Failure to do so would be a betrayal of the memory of the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the security of current and future generations.

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