

Chapter 15

Major Challenges Opportunities and Next Steps for the Parties to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty Approaching the 2020 Review Conference



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Editor's Note: The Conference occurred shortly before votes for the next Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency, and Ambassador Grossi, who was President Designate of the 2020 NPT Review Conference, was also a candidate to be DG of the IAEA (and later was selected). For this reason, he was unable to attend the Conference physically, but he participated by video link. He delivered his talk and stayed connected for the discussion afterward. This is a transcript of his talk.

I would like to thank the organizers of the Amaldi Conference, one of the most prestigious gatherings we have around this set of international policy issues. So, it is really an honour and privilege to share the podium with those who spoke before. I will lead with my own personal presentation on the NPT Review conference itself, and then have an exchange with you and listen to your ideas and your comments.

By way of introduction, this time the Review Conference comes at a very special moment. It is the 10th Review Conference, which means that it is marking the 50th anniversary after the entry into force of this treaty, the largest idea known in international law which is in itself quite a feat, a remarkable issue. It is also a conference that is coming 25 years after the 1995 Review and Extension Conference, which decided on extending this instrument forever. And it comes at a time where there are lots of events ongoing in the world where multilateral approach to arms control, disarmament, and proliferation have been discussed, and where there are certain trends considered by some as worrisome.

The Review Conference is a great opportunity to reassess how the treaty is being implemented and to have a larger view to other connected questions, matters that

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have been added on in a certain sense to the NPT in its pure form without being part of the treaty provisions. There are many other things that are interconnected and are being looked at in this sense. One of the reasons why the conference this time around is being seen as particularly challenging is also because of the fact that 5 years ago we gathered in New York and the Review Conference ended up without a consensus around a final document. Which means that when we gather in New York next year, it will have been 10 years without an agreed view, common view from states parties to the NPT of how the instrument has been implemented and is working. And of course in the course of these past 10 years a number of things have happened affecting or influencing not only the disarmament part of the instrument, but also other sections or other issue areas which are covered as you know in the articles of the treaty that have to do with non-proliferation or the peaceful uses of the atom. So, as we can see, it is a moment where people will be focusing on what happens in New York, people will be judging perhaps the importance, the validity, and the future stability of the multilateral non-proliferation regime on the basis of our deliberations in New York. So, it is a big responsibility upon every single state party to this important instrument.

Of course, one discounts that the political issues, the political problems may have and do have a logic of their own. One cannot predict what will happen when it comes to regional situations in terms of non-proliferation or what will be the state of affairs when it comes to bilateral relations and bilateral understanding between for example the Russian Federation and the United States, which have an impact on disarmament issues. All of these are matters that go beyond the will of one like me, who is going to preside over this effort. What one can do is to professionally try to prepare in an adequate manner, trying to identify these challenges, these opportunities, and design the next steps that could be applied in order perhaps not to guarantee success, because this is something one can never do, but increase substantially the possibility of a successful outcome when we meet next year. This, I think, is a very possible scenario.

One of the novelties this time around is that we need to prepare better and at an earlier stage and perhaps do it in a slightly different way, given the state of affairs in the world, given all these uncertainties that exist, given also the degree of questioning and challenging of multilateral approaches to disarmament and also to non-proliferation. Traditionally, before a few months in advance of the Review Conference, there were a number of consultations in Vienna, in Geneva, and in New York with political groups and parties to understand what major difficulties there will be and what challenges would present themselves. This time you may have noticed that early on, from the beginning of the preparatory cycle, starting with the Dutch presidency back in 2017, continuing with the Polish in the year after that, and finally with the Malaysian chairmanship, we have seen an increased focus and in some cases in the two first chairmanships, efforts of outreach to have an earlier discussion, debate, exchange of ideas on what has been going on.

Once the curtain came down after the third PREPCON last April in New York, I said my work began and it has actually been the case. How did I do it? What did I propose? Well, I felt that it was necessary for the first time to have a dedicated,

intensified process of wide consultations led by the president designate. Of course, this does not exclude other efforts that are traditional under other forums, like your conference—track two, track one—but in this case a process led by the President Designate, which would allow me to have a direct conversation with different countries in their specific regions. I did this by way of a process for which resources were needed. One needs to reach out, one needs to bring countries to focal places where you are going to have the discussions and for that I proposed to the European Union a concept and a programme of consultations. The EU gave generously and decided to extend their support. So, I am very grateful to the European partners for the support they gave me to start organizing these meetings. These meetings that I have been conducting so far take the form of regional consultations which have, although not exclusive, have also some focus on the area of peaceful uses of nuclear energy, science, and applications. We have done this because we felt that apart from the very interesting, strategic level of considerations and discussions on issues pertaining to Article 6, disarmament or regional aspects of non-proliferation like the Middle East or things of this sort, there had been in the past some imbalance. Imbalance in the sense that sufficient attention was not being paid to all these areas of peaceful uses, which are actually the areas of greatest and most immediate interest and benefit for the large majority of state parties to the NPT. These are, of course, made possible by scientists because you have this knowledge. So, in our estimation, we thought it was important to do two things: first, to have these regionally oriented conferences, but also to have a dialogue that would bring to the table practitioners, technologist, nuclear regulators, technical support organizations. Those who are really in the daily exercise of work around peaceful uses of nuclear energy and who in my opinion had been largely absent from these conversations in the past. There was nothing wrong with that, but it was limited in a way to the diplomatic corps in the cities in the multilateral disarmament and non-proliferation hubs, like Vienna, New York, or Geneva.

We have started this process, we have already had a regional meeting in Addis Ababa. We went to Africa to start, and there we had a very encouraging beginning with more than 40 countries in attendance. The attendance of the African Commission on Nuclear Energy (AFCONE), the African Union Commission, and we also had the EU represented there. The member states found this kind of approach that we are proposing to be of enormous interest. We are going to have a number of follow up meetings to this coming up: one in Bangkok for Asia, in Mexico for the Latin American and Caribbean region, and the success of this first attempt has been such that more regions and sub-regions have reached out to me requesting more of these consultations, more of these meetings. So much so that I have had to reach out to individual donor countries to fund meetings because the generosity of the EU had already been tapped, and we needed to continue these meetings. One of them will take place in Abuja, Nigeria with a focus on the ECOWAS region, but that is not the only one. There will be one in Pretoria in South Africa. There is going to be one more in Brazil for my part of the world. There is going to be one in Indonesia for Asia. There is a lot of interest in these presidentially led, intensive pre RevCon consultations.

Process is not substance, but process enables substance to be treated in a way that is constructive and conducive to success as opposed to one which is more confrontational.

In these first consultations, a number of interesting friends are starting to manifest themselves. I am describing to you in very general terms what I am seeing as strengths and one thing I see, which is admittedly a general affirmation, but still one that is indispensable and it is necessary before we take the plunge in New York for the Review Conference and this sort of newly found re-commitment to the NPT. I see a lot of convinced countries, north and south, east and west, that see in this norm a norm that is valid, that is present and most of all that is a norm that is a future projection. I say this because I am sure you have been debating this and perhaps we can have an exchange after my presentation. There is a legitimate discussion about the NPT, its validity, the appearance of other norms and considerations of this type and sort. In terms of our preparation for the RevCon, we are working with many countries on an important high-level part of the Review Conference, which is not going to be structured in the sense of having a special document or a special statement, but it is a dedicated effort. We are already working collectively and individually with key countries to encourage their leaders at the Foreign Minister level or ideally at the Head of State level to be present in New York. We would like them to come and to say that we all see in the NPT a normative structure that has meaning and that has value for the future. This finding of mine is something that is giving me a lot of hope and that countries recognize that it will be in no one's interest to see the Review Conference fail.

No one's strategic interests would be served by having a Conference which ends up in disarray or in the absence of agreement. We can discuss about agreement, the form, shape and modality of agreement, but one thing is for sure and this I stress, that as I see it is the will, the collective will of all, to come out of the exercise in the belief and the conviction that the NPT has come out strengthened and not debilitated or weakened after the effort. I have also to indicate that I have seen engagement from the constituencies, as I was saying, from many countries who were not so mobilized, as I said in ministries of energy, science and technology and a community which is bigger and larger than before.

Before I conclude, I would like also to refer to something that is not necessarily part of the formal part of the Review Conference, but rather as part of what I would like to see: That is the presence and relevance of the NPT in a societal manner, outside of the UN building. For the first time, at the Review Conference we are going to have three important events. I do not call them side events because first of all they will not be on the side of the conference, in the sense that we will have to go outside the UN building to have them, but they are very relevant. The first will be a meeting with youth groups from all over the world that are preoccupied and dealing with non-proliferation, disarmament, or international security. It is going to be called "The NPT at 50: The Next Generation." So we are in contact with a good number of networks of young practitioners or young scholars, groups all around the world, on every continent, that have been active and are going to be meeting. We are having this as a very decentralized process. After my original invitation, some of these groups

are already meeting and discussing and they will provide us with some elements that I am going to be able to relay to the wider membership for their consideration. So, youth is the first.

The second has to do with gender. I think these days any multilateral approach must be looking at the gender issue as important, not only by way of an increased participation of women, but also by including gender-based perspective to it. I can say this event is going to be called “NPT at 50: Better Together,” and I am working with Women in Nuclear Global and other important groups that exist in many countries to bring also this input from groups that are concerned with the added value that the gender perspective can bring to this issue.

The third and last event I am bringing for the discussion at the NPT Review Conference will be a meeting with global nuclear industries. We will have also a meeting with the major industrial concerns around the world, including not only the traditional nuclear vendors that you may have in mind as I say these words, and I can guarantee you that all of them are participating and are very keen on being there, but also firms around the world that are working with nuclear science and applications. We are going to be establishing or highlighting if you want the link between the NPT and all the industrial or even commercial activities that take place all around the world and are sustained by the treaty. So, I will perhaps stop here since my intention at least with my initial remarks has been to tell you how I, as President Designate of the 2020 NPT Review Conference, have undertaken this effort, from which perspective, how am I looking at it and the things I am doing so far, as I said in the beginning, perhaps not to ensure success because that is impossible for me, but to increase the scope of the dialogue and thereby to also instil the sense of optimism in state parties, to believe that yes agreement is possible, that yes agreement will not necessarily mean that we will solve all the problems that we have in non-proliferation and disarmament, but will continue to strengthen the NPT as one of the tools that we have to deal with those in a successful way. So, I will stop here and will be more than glad to exchange with you further ideas or listen to your questions or comments. Thank you very much for your attention.

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