

what is the NPT?

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) opened for signature in 1968 and quickly entered into force, becoming international law on 5 March 1970 when 43 governments ratified the text. By the year 2000, 187 governments had ratified the treaty — nearly every government in the world. Of these, 182 do not have nuclear weapons.

EXTENDING THE TREATY FROM 1995:

The Review Conference (RevCon) in 1995 was extremely controversial. The decision to make this temporary treaty regime a permanent body was a difficult one that caused fierce splits in both the NGO and governmental communities. Some lament the decision taken in 1995, declaring the treaty an “irrelevant and stillborn” disarmament tool. Others feel that the arms control and disarmament regime was strengthened by the permanence of the treaty.

The NPT recognizes only five governments as Nuclear Weapons States (NWS). It defines a NWS as one that had manufactured and exploded a nuclear weapon or other nuclear explosive device prior to 1 January 1967. Therefore, the NWS recognized in the NPT are the United States of America, France, Russia, China and the United Kingdom.

However, there are now three other countries that are known to have nuclear weapons – these are Israel, India and Pakistan. To date, these three states and Cuba remain the only countries not to have signed the NPT.

KEY TEXT - ARTICLE VI:

There are 11 Articles written into the NPT. The key article within the treaty relating to nuclear weapons disarmament is Article VI. This reads:

“Each of the Parties to the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.”

THE NPT TALK CYCLE:

REVIEW CONFERENCES: The governments of the world gather on a five-yearly basis to review the Treaty. This meeting is called a Review Conference (or RevCon). While the NPT is not technically speaking a UN body, it is serviced by the UN Secretariat and meetings are held at the United Nations. Governments, particularly NWS, are expected to report during RevCons under three key headings: Nuclear Weapons Free Zones, Nuclear Disarmament and Safeguards.

PREPARATORY MEETINGS: Since 1995, when the NPT review cycle was strengthened, there have been regular Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) meetings in the build-up to the review conferences. The PrepComs aim to monitor progress, develop strategies and implement the broader aims of nuclear disarmament in the lead up to the major RevCons.

NEXT MEETINGS: The next round of talks on nuclear non-proliferation will be at the PrepCom meetings to be held in 2002, 2003, and 2004. This will lead into the next RevCon in 2005. Non-governmental organizations will continue to work towards these meetings to ensure that nuclear non-proliferation remains a key area of focus of their governments.

THE 2000 REVIEW CONFERENCE:

The Review Conference (RevCon) for 2000 was held in New York in April/May 2000. It was attended by 157 governments.

At the NPT 2000 RevCon, a number of unprecedented commitments were made. The most notable was the first unequivocal political commitment that binds the five biggest nuclear-armed nations to the “total” elimination of their arsenals.

In the official final document to come from the NPT 2000 RevCon, a 13 point “action plan” for disarmament was outlined.

The action plan is provided on the next page. All parties to the NPT have agreed to this plan of action, which clearly states that nuclear disarmament is possible, provided that the governments adhere to these steps.

The next NPT Review Conference will be held in 2005

Preparatory meetings will be held in 2002, 2003 and 2004

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