

Briefing by Prof. Ana María Cetto
Chair of the independent Scientific Panel on the Effects of Nuclear War, to the
First Committee of the General Assembly

Tuesday, 21 October 2025, 10:00am

Your Excellency Ambassador Maurizio Massari,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour to brief you today on the progress of the independent Scientific Panel on the Effects of Nuclear War, which was established pursuant to General Assembly Resolution 79/238.

Before doing so, please allow me to introduce myself briefly, as this is the first time I have had the honour to speak before you. My name is Ana María Cetto, and the members of this Panel have appointed me as its Chair. I am a full research professor at the Institute of Physics of the National Autonomous University of Mexico. I have been a consultant to UNESCO for the World Conference on Science, among others; a member of the UN University Governing Board; Secretary General of the International Council for Science; and President of the Mexican Physical Society. From 2003 to 2010, I served as Deputy Director General for Technical Cooperation at the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As this Committee is well aware, and as we have just heard, the renewed prospects of nuclear war bring with them the possibility of catastrophic humanitarian and environmental consequences.

The last General Assembly-mandated “Study on the Climatic and Other Global Effects of Nuclear War” was published a long time ago, in 1988.

It is against this backdrop that Resolution 79/238 was adopted in 2025. The resolution recalls that "removing the threat of nuclear war is the most acute and urgent task of the present day" and calls for "an updated, comprehensive scientific assessment of the effects of nuclear war and its consequences, determining where there is agreement among the scientific community and where more research is needed."

Ladies and gentlemen,

In accordance with the mandate set forth in Resolution 79/238, the Secretary-General appointed the 21 members of the Panel in their personal capacities on the basis of nominations from Member States and a broad public call for candidates.

Members were selected for their leading scientific expertise across relevant disciplines while ensuring impartiality and equitable geographical and gender representation. In selecting the Panel, the Secretary-General drew on the expertise and recommendations of relevant United Nations agencies.

Having now been established, the Panel is mandated to examine “the physical effects and societal consequences” of a nuclear war, “on a local, regional and planetary scale” and is empowered to review and commission relevant studies, with the aim of publishing “a comprehensive report.” Our final report will be considered in 2027, at UNGA 82.

At its first plenary meeting, which took place on September 4-5, the Panel appointed me, as well as a Vice-Chair, Sir Andrew Haines. The Panel also decided to divide its work into three groups:

Working Group 1 focuses on the physical effects of nuclear explosions (single

or multiple), including blast effects, climate, radiation and fires.

Working Group 2 focuses on the direct impacts on populations, ecosystems, agriculture, and animal health.

Working Group 3 focuses on the cascading economic, financial, societal, and governance impacts, including the effects on interdependent critical infrastructure systems.

The Working Groups have decided to appoint two co-facilitators each for groups 1 and 2 and one facilitator for group 3.

All of the Working Groups have met at least once and will meet regularly every two to three weeks, in addition to working intensely between meetings. The Groups have begun compiling relevant studies and discussing possible scenarios as well as an appropriate report structure.

Panelists' membership across Working Groups ensures cross-pollination and shared awareness of the discussions in each group. Additionally, one member has been appointed to serve as the Scientific Secretary of the Panel. This will help coordinate scientific assessments and ensure consistent approaches across groups, as well as identify and address any gaps in the scope of the Panel's work.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Panel aims to analyze and synthesize the growing body of scientific knowledge on the effects of nuclear war within the context of current scientific and technological developments. The stakes are of the utmost seriousness, and our work must be likewise. In line with the Panel's mandate, we will determine where there is agreement among the scientific community and which areas require further research. We will draw our conclusions from a critical and rigorous assessment of the evidence.

I am fortunate to chair a Panel whose distinguished members bring a wealth of expertise in various fields. It includes physicists who specialize in nuclear risk assessment; atmospheric scientists; environmental and geochemists; medical doctors who focus on radiation epidemiology, as well as climate change and health; and specialists in complex socio-economic systems. Other panelists specialize in agricultural, animal and veterinary sciences and in data modeling.

We understand, however, that we cannot undertake this work in isolation, without the assistance of outside expertise. Nor should we.

Our mandate not only calls upon us to review and commission relevant studies, but also to consult with a broad range of scientists and experts, as well as the widest possible range of stakeholders, including civil society, affected communities and peoples from around the world. Other parts of the United Nations system and relevant agencies are also called upon to support our work.

The identification of scientists and experts, with whom the Panel will hold a first round of consultations, is currently underway. Those consultations will be held during the first week of December, facilitated by the Secretariat. They will be preceded by the Panel's second plenary meeting at the end of November.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am encouraged by the progress that has been made so far, as well as by the commitment and cooperative spirit of the panel members. Although the presentation of the Panel's final report to States is still two years away, we are aware of the amount of information to be considered, discussions to be held, and work to be done. On behalf of the Panel, I would like to express our appreciation to the General Assembly for its support, to the Secretariat for its valuable assistance, and to you for this opportunity to speak with you today.

Thank you.