



**United Nations Office
for Disarmament Affairs**

**Keynote remarks at the NTI Event “Risk reduction in the Spotlight:
A talk with former US Senator Sam Nunn (NTI) and a presentation of
initiatives and work on reducing the risks of nuclear use”**

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As delivered



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Your Excellency, Deputy Federal Commissioner Riegraf,

Your Excellency, Senator Nunn,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to join you this afternoon. I want to thank Germany and Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI) for bringing us together to discuss the critical issue of reducing the risk of nuclear weapon use.

Today, the risk of a nuclear weapon being used is higher than at any time since the depths of the Cold War. Due to a confluence of factors – geostrategic tensions and rapid technological change – the prospects for mistake, miscalculation, and escalation mean that the risk has become alarmingly acute.

The current environment is a dangerous mix of several major trends: geopolitical tensions and the return of so-called “great power competition”, an increasingly multipolar nuclear order beset by new and longstanding regional crises with nuclear overtones, and a suite of era-defining technological advances the impact of which is still emerging and unclear. Without the proper guardrails, this combination may prove to be a recipe for disaster.

Throughout the history of nuclear weapons there have been too many close calls. In today’s environment, we cannot afford another: the margin for error is far too slim.

In our efforts to prevent such a disaster, I believe three premises must guide us:

- 1) First, any use of a nuclear weapon would lead to a humanitarian catastrophe.

- 2) Second, once the nuclear threshold is crossed, it is unlikely to be limited to one weapon.
- 3) And third, the effects of nuclear weapons know no borders. Any use of a nuclear weapon will have global ramifications.

It should go without saying: the *only way to eliminate the risks associated with nuclear weapons is to fully eliminate nuclear weapons.*

Eighty years after its founding, nuclear disarmament remains the United Nations' highest disarmament priority. The total elimination of nuclear weapons, and the fulfilment of Article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, must be pursued with urgency.

Until that goal is achieved, given the catastrophic societal and environmental consequences associated with nuclear weapons, it is vital to ensure that they are never used.

Practical risk reduction measures are needed to prevent nuclear war. Such measures can be agreements between those States that possess nuclear weapons, between all States, or at regional levels.

They can include:

- Security and confidence-building measures – such as launch and other notifications,
- Transparency initiatives including those related to numbers,
- Robust crisis communications,
- Agreements to prevent escalation – perhaps related to non-interference in command and control,
- Doctrine measures such as credible no-first use postures.

The Cold War provided a useful playbook of measures to reduce the risk of nuclear weapon use. It would serve us well to see what can and cannot work in today's environment, including in different regional contexts. It would also be useful to see what new measures are needed to take into account current technological advances.

As we look ahead to the 2026 NPT Review Conference, we must inject positive momentum into discussions around the prevention of the use of nuclear weapons, rebuild trust and confidence, and finally get the world back on the path towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons.

I thank you very much for your attention.