IAEA Background Guide

AMBMUN'27

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IAEA

International Atomic Energy Agency

Dear Delegates,

We are beyond ecstatic to welcome you to the 4th edition of AMBMUN, where you will be participating in the International Atomic Energy Agency! Because this is one of the most powerful and significant bodies in international diplomacy, your role as delegates is to address some of the world's most critical issues.

This year, the agenda is mainly centered around the inequalities in access to peaceful nuclear technology and allegations of nuclear apartheid within the IAEA and Nuclear NPT Framework. The nature of this topic allows countries all over the world to approach questions like “To what extent is access to peaceful nuclear technology determined by political alliances rather than the equal rights of NPT member states?” or even “How can nuclear-weapon states justify restricting others from developing nuclear capabilities while failing to fulfill their own disarmament obligations?”

As members of the IAEA, you will tackle urgent and crucial subtopics such as IAEA safeguards, export controls, selective enforcement, and sanctions. Us chairs are expecting you to deeply dive into these matters while representing your country's political interests, your country’s priorities and policies, your country’s historical context, and your country’s stance.

This guide will only do so much; the rest of the research and arguments will all be up to you delegates. We are looking favorably upon hearing the arguments of thoroughly researched delegates that have nothing but clear, concise arguments to offer. Let’s make it as passionate as possible — make this conference count!

We would be more than happy to witness delegates of diplomatic thinking and persuasive communication throughout the conference.

Sincerely,

Haya Nasar & Omar Abdaljawad

Committee overview

The IAEA was set up in 1957 to promote peaceful nuclear cooperation and at the same time to ensure that its assistance was not being used for military purposes. Article II of its Statute links nuclear advancement to peace, health and prosperity. It is an organization which sits at the nexus of development and security, promoting peaceful uses of nuclear technology while at the same time addressing the security concerns which arise from the potential for such technology to be used for military purposes.

The central framework for the balance is the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of nuclear weapons (NPT). Article IV recognizes the right of States Parties to develop and utilize nuclear energy for peaceful purposes without discrimination in accordance with Articles I and II and promotes the exchange of technology (with a particular focus on developing countries). Article III requires non-nuclear weapon States Parties to accept IAEA safeguards, subject to the proviso that such safeguards should not be used to the detriment of their economic and technological development. The political dispute is over whether the commitments are implemented in an equitable manner.

The Group of Non-Aligned States Parties has contended that restrictions and additional conditions on peaceful nuclear cooperation will upset the balance of the Treaty and exacerbate the gap between the developed and the developing countries. The nuclear suppliers on the other hand maintain that export controls are essential to prevent the use of peaceful nuclear technology for weapons programmes (with respect to uranium enrichment and spent fuel reprocessing).

The dispute is therefore one of sovereignty and dependence on foreign suppliers, and of the line that can be drawn between legitimate security requirements and discriminatory restrictions. Within that debate “nuclear apartheid" is a contested political charge as much as anything else regarding unequal access and influence. Institutional representation is also relevant in this context with Article VI of the IAEA Statute providing for membership of the Board of Governors based on technological advancement as well as geographical representation and elected membership. That provides a basis for looking at the balance between technical expertise and equitable representation within the Agency’s governance.

Topic overview

The Inequalities in Access to Peaceful Nuclear Technology and Allegations of Nuclear Apartheid within the IAEA and Nuclear NPT Framework

The history of nuclear technology is inextricably linked to questions of power, security and national independence. It's not just a matter of science. Nuclear capability has been a major factor in the way the world has been organized diplomatically, in terms of strategic competition and in the distribution of power. When the NPT came into force in 1970 it was designed to deal with all those issues through three pillars: disarmament, non-proliferation and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

Over 50 years on, there remains a great deal of disagreement as to whether those commitments have in fact been fulfilled and whether the benefits of nuclear advancement have in fact been available to all the States Parties. The whole issue of the distinction between the recognized nuclear weapon states and the non-recognized ones is a major point of contention. The treaty does provide for the same peaceful use rights for both groups but the differing obligations of the two have led to all sorts of arguments about historical privilege and unequal responsibilities. That becomes particularly acute when the access to technology is dependent on the supplier states, the export conditions and the level of confidence that the international community has in the nature of the nuclear activities of a given state. The political question is therefore whether the restrictions in place are serving a legitimate non-proliferation purpose or are in fact imposing an unfair burden on a country which is simply trying to develop peacefully.

The successive NPT review conferences have highlighted the difficulty of reconciling the various viewpoints. The 1995 negotiations on the indefinite extension of the Treaty produced no consensus outcome, as did the 2005, 2015 and 2022 review conferences. The Eleventh Review Conference in May 2026 likewise produced no substantive consensus outcome. The problems are not simply down to the issue of access to peaceful nuclear technology. They are about disarmament, regional security and compliance in general.

Within that wider debate the developing countries have been challenging the restrictions they see as inconsistent with their rights to peaceful use, while the supplier states have been stressing the importance of safeguards and controls on sensitive technologies. Financial constraints, lack of skilled personnel and dependence on external assistance all add to the difficulty of access and so inequality is a matter of both politics and practicality.

"nuclear apartheid" is of course a contentious allegation in that the international nuclear system is in effect maintaining the advantages of the established powers at the expense of the rest. That allegation has to be assessed by making a distinction between unequal capacity and discriminatory treatment and by looking at the extent to which restrictions are in conflict with the obligations of the states under the treaty. The committee will have to consider how the IAEA and the wider NPT system can be used to promote more equitable forms of cooperation, transparency

and trust without in any way compromising the effectiveness of the system in the prevention of proliferation.

Previous Actions

International efforts to promote peaceful nuclear cooperation and at the same time prevent military misuse pre-dated the establishment of the modern non-proliferation regime. These efforts eventually coalesced into a mix of international agreements, verification arrangements and technical assistance programmes designed to achieve a balance between security and access to nuclear technology. In 1953 the President's Atoms for Peace initiative proposed that nuclear knowledge and resources be directed towards peaceful ends through international co-operation. This led to the creation of the IAEA in 1957. The Agency started to provide technical assistance in 1958 (in the form of training, expertise and equipment). Its initial safeguards system was adopted in 1961 and extended in 1964. This system introduced a set of procedures for the verification of the peaceful use of nuclear material and nuclear facilities which were covered by a safeguards arrangement.

The NPT opened for signature in 1968 and entered into force in 1970. It established an international framework in which the non-proliferation obligations of States Parties were linked to their obligations to disarm and to engage in peaceful nuclear cooperation. Article IV confirmed the rights of States Parties to the peaceful use of nuclear energy in accordance with Articles I and II and called for the exchange of equipment, materials and scientific information on a worldwide basis. It also made provision for the needs of the developing countries with the peaceful use of nuclear energy being a fundamental aspect of the Treaty. Regional agreements were subsequently put in place to provide practical mechanisms for the expansion of cooperation. The Regional Cooperative Agreement for Research, Development and Training related to Nuclear Science and Technology (RCA) was established in 1972 and facilitated joint projects in the Asia-Pacific region. The African Regional Cooperative Agreement (AFRA) came into force in 1990 and provided a similar framework for the African states. Both agreements were designed to promote the sharing of expertise, training and research and thus to help the participating countries to build up their own capacity to apply nuclear technology to their development needs.

At the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference the States Parties agreed to extend the Treaty indefinitely. The accompanying decisions strengthened the review process and set out the principles and objectives of non-proliferation and disarmament. A separate resolution was adopted calling for a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. Taken together, these measures linked the continued existence of the Treaty to the expectation of accountability, further disarmament and progress on the regional front.

The 2000 Review Conference produced a Final Document (a consensus document) with 13 practical steps towards disarmament. These included an unambiguous commitment by the nuclear-armed states to eliminate their nuclear arsenals. The measures in the document were intended to be practical benchmarks against which implementation could be assessed and to reinforce the expectation that non-proliferation obligations would be matched by tangible steps towards disarmament. The 2005 Review Conference produced nothing of substance. The disagreements were essentially over the relative importance of disarmament and non-proliferation and the status of the 1995 and 2000 commitments. It once again highlighted the difficulty of turning prior agreements into a common programme of action.

In 2010 the States Parties adopted a 64 point Action Plan covering disarmament, non-proliferation and peaceful uses of nuclear energy. The Conference also agreed on measures relating to the implementation of the 1995 Middle East resolution. That was a further step in establishing a common ground for cooperation, of course the implementation would still depend on national policies and on continued political will. The IAEA's Technical Cooperation Programme was also on the go during this period providing training, equipment and scientific assistance. The projects supported a range of areas including cancer diagnosis and treatment, agricultural productivity, water resource management and the environment. They were very much about providing practical means of widening access, and of course underlined the need for continued funding and for domestic institutional capacity.

Further diplomatic setbacks ensued. The 2015 Review Conference failed to reach agreement on any substantive outcome, primarily due to the proposals on the Middle East resolution. In 2022 the lack of agreement on issues of nuclear safety and security in the context of armed conflict also prevented a consensus being reached. There was however a working group established to improve the review process. This met in July 2023 but no recommendations were agreed. The November 2024 IAEA Ministerial Declaration reaffirmed support for nuclear science, technology and technical cooperation as tools for development and reiterated the importance of international cooperation and wider access to the peaceful uses of nuclear technology. The 2026 NPT Review Conference again concluded without any substantive consensus outcome, underlining the difficulty of moving from common aspirations to actual agreement.

Questions and Solutions

1. How can states balance peaceful nuclear development with non-proliferation obligations?
2. When are restrictions on nuclear technology transfers justified, and who should oversee them?

3. How can nuclear-weapon states be held accountable for their disarmament commitments?

4. How can developing countries build independent nuclear capabilities?

5. How can the IAEA ensure safeguards are applied fairly and consistently?

6. What responsibilities do technologically advanced states have in sharing nuclear knowledge and expertise?

7. How can international nuclear cooperation be protected from political and economic competition?

8. Does the current NPT framework adequately protect the peaceful nuclear rights of all Member States?

9. How can the international community address unequal access without compromising nuclear security?

10. What reforms could make international nuclear cooperation more transparent, accessible and effective?

Country Matrix

- Russia
- USA
- China
- France
- UK
- Pakistan
- India
- Japan
- Germany
- Canada
- Australia
- South Korea
- Saudi Arabia
- Algeria
- South Africa
- Brazil
- Egypt
- Iraq
- Nigeria
- Iran
- Kazakhstan
- Ukraine
- Belgium
- North Korea
- Libya

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