



## FACT SHEET:



### What Are the Risks of Nuclear Weapons?

#### Accidental launch:

- Thousands of warheads remain on high-alert; once launched, they cannot be recalled;
- There have been over 20 recorded instances of false alarms, including computer glitches, that were narrowly avoided;
- In addition to the risk posed by and for the US and Russia, those with the biggest arsenals, an even greater risk applies in India and Pakistan, whose long history of conflict combined with their close proximity makes it even more likely that a false alarm lead to an accidental launch;
- Space-based missile defense interceptors, such as those proposed by the US, can increase the risk of accidental detonation by eliminating pace-based early warning satellites, used by both the US and Russia;

#### Radiological Dirty Bomb:

- A “dirty bomb” is a device containing radioactive material and conventional explosives, such as dynamite;
- When the device explodes, neither fusion nor fission occur, though it will spread the radioactive material, contaminating the surrounding area;
- Radiological terrorism has occurred twice, in 1995 and 1998, both in Russia;

#### Environmental Consequences of Nuclear Weapons:

- Radioactive materials released from the testing or detonation of nuclear weapons remain in the ecosystem for thousands of years;
- Drinking radioactive contaminated water over a long period of time is closely linked to high cancer rates;
- Nuclear radiation, which results from the neutrons and gamma rays associated with fission, is lethal in high doses, and has many lingering effects, including increased cancer rates and organ damage. In addition to the 200,000 estimated deaths from the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs, thousands of other civilians developed cancer and other diseases from the high levels of radiation.

#### Nuclear Weapons Proliferation:

- In late 2003 a clandestine network, headed by the father of the Pakistani nuclear program - Dr. A.Q. Khan, was found to have been secretly and illegally supplying nuclear weapons technology to Libya, Iran and North Korea;
- The risk of other nuclear proliferation increases if the commitments of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty are not honored and the verification regime is not maintained.
- Some countries have referenced the non-proliferation regime as “nuclear apartheid” – a system structured by the nuclear weapons states to deny non-nuclear weapons states status and respect and to keep technology from them in order to maintain their inferior and dependent status;
- In an interview after receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei commented that “we need a security system that’s equitable...you cannot ask everybody not to smoke while you’re dangling a cigarette from your mouth. It is not credible; it is not sustainable.”