

Canada's Submission

This submission provides a summary of Canada's views on UNGA A/RES/78/240 Resolution "Addressing the legacy of nuclear weapons: providing victim assistance and environmental remediation to Member States affected by the use or testing of nuclear weapons." This submission responds to a note verbale from the Office of Disarmament Affairs (ODA/2024/00018/LONW), pursuant to OP4 of the above-mentioned resolution, requesting the Secretary-General to seek the views of Member States.

The importance of victim assistance and environmental remediation

Canada appreciates the efforts of Kazakhstan and Kiribati to generate greater attention to, and need for action on, the provision of victim assistance and environmental remediation to states affected by the use or testing of nuclear weapons. Redressing past harms is not only a moral imperative but can also help advance disarmament by raising awareness of the effects of nuclear weapons use and testing.

Canada supports increased dialogue and action on victim assistance and environmental remediation, including through the Review Process of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). The NPT's near-universality offers an opportunity for collaboration and information exchange.

The Canadian context

As a non-nuclear-weapon State in full compliance with the NPT and a Ratifying State of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), Canada has neither tested nor used nuclear weapons. The physiological health of civilians in Canada has not been significantly affected by legacy fallout from nuclear explosive testing.

In 2008, Canada's Department of National Defence established the Atomic Veterans Recognition Program to recognize, on an ex-gratia basis, Canadian military veterans and science and technology workers who participated in nuclear explosive testing outside Canada or decontamination efforts at Canada's Chalk River Laboratories. Approximately 700 former Canadian military personnel participated in up to 29 nuclear weapons trials by the United Kingdom and United States between 1946 and 1963.

Canada's nuclear regulator, the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission (CNSC), has not been engaged in environmental remediation efforts from nuclear explosive testing or nuclear use. It has, however, responded to incidents at nuclear power plants in Chernobyl, Ukraine (1986) and Fukushima, Japan (2011) through the International Atomic Energy Agency and International Commission on Radiological Protection. Currently, the CNSC regulates the remediation of soils containing historic low-level radioactive waste and industrial waste in the municipality of Port Hope, Ontario.

Moving forward

Canada recognizes that important challenges stand in the way of an effective international response on this matter, including the absence of international standards for defining victimhood and a lack of international recognition of the immediate and long-term effects of nuclear weapons use or testing on human health (especially female reproductive health), infrastructure and the environment. Further research, including into the gendered impacts of ionizing radiation on women and girls, and information exchanges will be critical in this regard.

Canada is open to exploring opportunities for practical cooperation on victim assistance and environmental remediation, with a view to addressing the disproportionate impacts of nuclear explosive testing or use on women and girls, Indigenous Peoples, and other marginalized communities. As a member of the Friends of the CTBT, Canada will also continue to champion the Treaty's entry into force as the ultimate guarantee against nuclear explosive testing.