No-first-use of Nuclear Weapons Initiative

Working paper submitted by China

1. The complete prohibition and thorough destruction of nuclear weapons, and the ultimate realization of a world without nuclear weapons, serve the common interests of mankind and constitute a shared aspiration for all countries. In his speech at the United Nations Office at Geneva in January, 2017, President Xi Jinping stated that “Nuclear weapons, the Sword of Damocles that hangs over humankind, should be completely prohibited and ultimately destroyed over time to make the world free of nuclear weapons.”

2. Facing complex and severe international security situation, President Xi Jinping has reaffirmed that nuclear weapons cannot be used and nuclear war must not be fought. In January 2022, the leaders of the five nuclear-weapon States released the Joint Statement of the leaders of the five Nuclear-Weapon States on Preventing Nuclear War and Avoiding Arms Races. The leaders affirmed that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought and reiterated that none of their weapons are targeted at each other or at any other State.

3. On October 16, 1964 when China successfully detonated its atomic bomb, China immediately made a solemn declaration to the world that it undertakes not to be the first to use nuclear weapons at any time and under any circumstances, and unconditionally commits itself not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear States or nuclear-weapon-free zones. In 1994, China submitted the “Draft Treaty on No-First Use of Nuclear Weapons” to the other four nuclear-weapon States and since then has been encouraging other nuclear-weapon States to commit to no-first use of nuclear weapons on a bilateral or multilateral basis.

4. China adheres to the no-first-use policy, based on its understanding of the nature of nuclear weapons and nuclear war. A nuclear war has no ultimate victor, but only bring huge disasters to humanity. China made the choice of developing nuclear weapons in a special historical period to cope with nuclear blackmail, break nuclear monopoly, and prevent nuclear war. China’s development of nuclear weapons is not for the purpose of threatening other countries, but for self-defense, safeguarding national strategic security, and contributing to world peace and stability.

5. The adoption of the no-first-use policy or declaration of no-first-use of nuclear weapons against each other by nuclear-weapon States is a practical step to implement Article VI of the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, reduce the role of nuclear weapons
in national security doctrines and promote the objective of nuclear disarmament. Under the current international strategic security situation, the above-mentioned policies and actions taken by nuclear-weapon States are conducive to enhancing strategic mutual trust, avoiding dangerous nuclear arms race, effectively reducing strategic risks, and promoting global balance and stability.

6. The no-first-use policy is increasingly becoming an important consensus and priority in the field of international arms control. Over the recent years, the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has publicly called for the no-first-use of any nuclear weapons. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Africa Union, the New Agenda Coalition, and many non-nuclear-weapon States have called on nuclear-weapon States to adopt a no-first-use policy.

7. In view of the above, China encourages the five nuclear-weapon States to negotiate and conclude a treaty on “mutual no-first-use of nuclear weapons” or issue a political statement in this regard. The following draft elements are presented as a basis for deliberation.

   (a) We are, convinced that nuclear war would have devastating consequences for all humanity and thus must never be fought, mindful of the primary responsibilities of the permanent members of the UN Security Council for the maintenance of world peace and security including the prevention of nuclear war, reiterating our commitment to work for the complete prohibition and thorough destruction of all types of weapons of mass destruction, believes that this Treaty will be conducive to international peace and security, thus can help create a favorable international environment for further progress in arms control and disarmament,

   (b) Each State Party undertakes not to be the first to use nuclear weapons against another State Party at any time and under any circumstances. Each State Party undertakes to support the early conclusion of a treaty on not using or threatening to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon States or nuclear-weapon-free zones.

   (c) Each State Party shall in exercising its national sovereignty have the right to withdraw from the Treaty if it decides that extraordinary events, related to the subject matter of this Treaty, have jeopardized the supreme interests of its country.

   (d) This Treaty shall be of unlimited duration. And the articles of this Treaty shall not be subject to any reservation.

8. China calls on all States parties to the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) to positively respond to and support China’s propositions. China is ready to engage in in-depth discussions on this issue within the P5 framework. China looks forward to thorough discussions on the above propositions during the 2026 NPT Review Conference and its preparatory committee meetings, with a view to achieving tangible results that could be incorporated into the outcome documents.