



Asia Pacific Leadership Network for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament

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Statement on Transparency

Transparency, in an arms control and disarmament context, means the sharing of information about security interests, concerns, expectations and capabilities with the objective of enhancing prospects for peaceful co-existence at the lowest possible level of armaments.

Transparency is fundamental to building confidence and trust. Whether it involves facts, assessments, interests, intentions, doctrines or internal processes, transparency lies at the heart of every confidence and security building measure ever devised.

APLN members believe that a deliberate effort by all nuclear-armed states to broaden and standardize security and defence transparency, in relation to past, present and future activities concerning nuclear weapons, will be indispensable for any significant progress towards their elimination.

APLN members urge the governments of all nuclear-armed states to seriously review whether their present postures in respect of nuclear transparency adequately address both their interests and their responsibilities.

APLN members urge the five recognized nuclear weapon states to set an example by undertaking national audits of their historical production of fissile material, as a basis for later discussions amongst them, and in due course with other nuclear-armed states, on problems encountered and how they might be addressed.

APLN members support the efforts of the ten-nation Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative (NPDI) and the International Panel on Fissile Materials to promote a draft standard nuclear disarmament reporting form in accordance with Action 21 recommended by the 2010 NPT Review Conference,

Why APLN Members Support Greater Transparency

1. We acknowledge that transparency in security and defence matters is still a quite revolutionary notion. Secrecy is a deeply entrenched tradition in all countries, within the armed forces and wider national security communities. Strategists from Sun Tsu to Clausewitz have highlighted the importance of secrecy and deception as vital edges in securing outcomes advantageous to the state. It took an extraordinary development – the advent of nuclear weapons (although they were themselves developed in secret in every case), and the imperative to prevent their use – to begin to turn the tables on instinctive secrecy and to develop a positive understanding of the security benefits of greater transparency:

2. Transparency rests upon, as much as it builds, confidence and trust. The familiar ‘chicken and egg’ conundrum applies here, in that a state must be confident that armed conflict is a remote prospect before it will consider meaningful additional transparency practices. The essential skill for political leadership is to cut through that conundrum: to strike a balance that qualifies the military instinct in favour of secrecy in order to capture the rewards – in mutual confidence and strategic stability – that transparency and openness can help deliver.

3. Transparency is not the same as verification. Verification is about arrangements that provide adequate confidence of compliance with formal agreements between states. Transparency, in contrast, involves the decision by a state to voluntarily expose credible information about its strategic aims, intentions and concerns, and about its current and prospective military capabilities. It entails a posture or attitude of reassurance that reaches beyond the usual rules and conventions governing relations between states, and beyond the requirements of the verification regimes and safeguards arrangements of treaties to which a state is party.

4. Transparency is an important means of acknowledging interdependence with other states in the security/defence arena, and a significant encouragement to reciprocity. For example, enhanced physical security of all sensitive nuclear material, wherever located, as promoted by the special summits held in Washington in 2010 and Seoul in 2012, is an objective that would be significantly advanced by a greater commitment to transparency by all states with nuclear weapons.

5. Conversely, resisting transparency, whether to hide strengths or weaknesses or obscure intentions, can have significant adverse consequences. By clouding the perceptions of other states and enabling worst-case thinking to establish a stronger foothold, the absence of transparency can seriously obscure and limit opportunities for mutually advantageous accommodation.

6. The internal consistency of the message conveyed through transparency measures, whatever its depth or detail, is of great importance. The objective is to leave other states confident that the message being conveyed has integrity. It will never be the whole story, but other states must have confidence that it is consistent with the whole story.

7. Consistency over time is also crucial. It takes time for a state to make a fundamental determination that another state’s declared security posture – its intentions, concerns and capabilities – has integrity. States continually assess one another’s behaviour in response to contemporary events and developments. Consistent positive experiences are necessary for confidence to grow that uneasy relationships need not remain mired in ambiguity, suspicion and animosity.

8. Transparency in some contexts is not just a confidence building measure but a crucial building block for specific policy outcomes. For example, advanced-stage disarmament negotiations will hinge, *inter alia*, on the confidence that each nuclear state has in the absence of undeclared fissile material in other states. Early transparency measures about the production history of these materials will be indispensable to agreement on the verification measures needed to support treaty obligations to reduce nuclear arsenals to minimal numbers and, ultimately, zero. Confirming the integrity of another state’s declaration regarding this production history and current stocks of fissile material will involve a prolonged process of evaluation and cross-checking. Leaving this step to the very end will deprive the process of an invaluable indicator of common purpose and put at risk the political momentum that will be crucial to success.

9. Significant international support for greater transparency in relation to nuclear weapons has been evident in recommendations of the NPT Review Conferences of 2000¹ and 2010², relating to reports on the implementation of Article VI of the NPT, and to the nuclear weapon states voluntarily providing standard information to the UN:

SIGNED

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¹ The thirteen practical steps unanimously agreed to at the 2000 NPT Review Conference to implement Article VI of the treaty included ‘increased transparency by the nuclear weapon states with regard to their nuclear weapons capabilities and the implementation of agreements pursuant to Article VI, and as a voluntary confidence-building measure to support further progress on nuclear disarmament’ (Step 9B), while Step 12 stipulated regular reporting on the implementation of nuclear disarmament.

² To give concrete effect to these agreements on transparency measures, the UN Secretary General in 2009 urged states to support his proposal for the creation of a register where reports on the implementation of Article VI could be lodged. The action plan that emerged from 2010 NPT Review Conference took this forward to the extent of encouraging (in Action 21) the nuclear weapon states ‘to agree as soon as possible on a standard reporting form and to determine appropriate reporting intervals for the purpose of voluntarily providing standard information without prejudice to national security.’

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