

Backgrounder

THE NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION TREATY

- The fundamental purpose of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) is to prevent the emergence of additional nuclear weapons states.
- The basic provisions of the NPT are as follows:
 - All states are prohibited from possessing nuclear weapons except the five nuclear weapons states – the United States, Russia, China, the United Kingdom and France.
 - All non-nuclear weapons states agree to international safeguards to ensure that their peaceful nuclear activities are not diverted to making such weapons.
 - The peaceful uses of nuclear energy and the transfer of equipment and technology for the range of its civilian application are to be promoted.
 - States parties are to commit to pursuing negotiations leading to general and complete disarmament, particularly the elimination of nuclear weapons by the nuclear weapons states.
- The Treaty has now been acceded to by 171 nations, including the five nuclear weapons states, making it the most widely adhered to international arms control agreement in history.
- The NPT was opened for signature on July 1, 1968. Canada signed the agreement on July 23, and ratified it on January 8, 1969. The Treaty entered into force on March 5, 1970.
- The operation of the Treaty is reviewed every five years to ensure that the purposes of its provisions are being realized. There have been four Review Conferences to date.
- At the time of the original negotiations, some countries were reluctant to foreswear the right to possess nuclear weapons for all time. Consequently, it was decided that 25 years after its entry into force – which period has now elapsed –, states parties would be required to decide whether the NPT should be extended indefinitely, or for a fixed period or periods. This key extension decision will be taken at a conference in New York, April 17-May 12.