The Draft Recommendations to the 2020 Review Conference of the NPT were published on 3 May 2019 (available at http://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/prepcom19/documents/CRP4.pdf). The draft has some positive elements, such as the explicit call to nuclear-weapon states to “cease the development of new types of nuclear weapons, and refrain from qualitative improvements to existing nuclear weapons” but, overall, the proposed Recommendations are disappointingly weak and unambitious.

The biggest failing in the draft text is with respect to the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons. In the Final Document of the 2010 Review Conference, NPT states parties expressed their “deep concern at the continued risk for humanity represented by the possibility that these weapons could be used and the catastrophic humanitarian consequences that would result from the use of nuclear weapons”. This time around, and despite the significantly increased risks of use, states parties are proposing merely to “further consider the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any intentional or accidental nuclear explosion”.

If this language stands, States parties would be going backwards at a critical time when the heightened risks of use need far greater concern and urgency to be demonstrated. Indeed, it is also shocking that despite general acceptance of the heightened risks of use do not even merit a mention. States parties should, at an absolute minimum, reaffirm the deep concern for the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons.

There is an “acknowledgement” of the support by “many States parties for the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and its complementarity with the NPT” but no call for ratification and early entry into force as there is for every other international treaty governing nuclear weapons. States parties should recognize that, in fact, a “majority of States parties” have expressed support for the TPNW. States parties should, at an absolute minimum, encourage early adherence to the TPNW.

States parties should also acknowledge that many states consider the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons an effective measure under Article VI of the NPT, and that it seeks to strengthen the existing disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation regime.