



The 2026 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference: What it Means for Southeast Asia

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By Julius Cesar Trajano

SYNOPSIS

The failure of the 2026 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) Review Conference to produce a consensus outcome document reflects deepening divisions within the global nuclear order. It also raises concerns among ASEAN member states committed to advancing nuclear disarmament, strengthening non-proliferation, and promoting the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

COMMENTARY

The [2026 Review Conference](#) of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) took place at the United Nations in New York from 27 April to 22 May 2026, at a time of heightened geopolitical rivalry, rapid technological change, and growing concerns over strategic stability. The international nuclear order is under increasing strain due to intensifying competition among major powers, modernisation of nuclear arsenals, challenges to arms control frameworks, and the expanding intersection between emerging technologies and nuclear weapons.

Against this backdrop, the Review Conference represents a critical opportunity for states parties to reaffirm commitments to the NPT's three pillars – nuclear non-proliferation, disarmament, and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy – while addressing evolving security realities. The urgency surrounding the Review Conference was further underscored by its inability to [produce a consensus outcome](#) document after four weeks of negotiations in New York. This marks the third consecutive unsuccessful NPT Review Conference after 2015 and 2022, reflecting widening divisions among states parties over nuclear disarmament obligations, regional proliferation concerns, and broader geopolitical tensions.

Concerns of Southeast Asia

For Southeast Asia, the outcomes of the NPT Review Conference carry particular significance. Although the region remains committed to maintaining a nuclear-weapon-free status through the Southeast Asian Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ) Treaty, also known as the Treaty of Bangkok, strategic developments beyond the region increasingly shape its security environment.

Intensifying major power competition in the Indo-Pacific, concerns surrounding nuclear deterrence dynamics, growing interest in civilian nuclear energy programmes, and emerging risks related to advanced technologies underscore the importance of sustained regional engagement in global nuclear governance. Several Southeast Asian states are also exploring nuclear energy programmes to support energy transition goals, further elevating the need for robust safeguards, nuclear security measures, and international cooperation.

As Southeast Asia navigates an increasingly complex strategic landscape, the 2026 NPT Review Conference provided an important platform for regional states to advance priorities related to non-proliferation, peaceful nuclear cooperation, and risk reduction. Strengthening multilateral commitment to the NPT remains essential not only for preserving the global non-proliferation regime but also for safeguarding long-term peace, stability, and sustainable development across Southeast Asia.

Southeast Asian concerns at the 2026 NPT Review Conference extended beyond longstanding commitments to nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. National statements delivered by ASEAN member states reveal increasing attention to the intersection of strategic stability, nuclear safety, nuclear security, and the future of peaceful nuclear development.

While Southeast Asia remains committed to preserving the region as a Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone through the Treaty of Bangkok, evolving geopolitical realities and growing civilian nuclear ambitions are reshaping regional priorities. For Southeast Asia, the failure to achieve consensus reinforces concerns that the multilateral institutions underpinning global nuclear governance are increasingly strained.

Several Southeast Asian countries highlighted concerns over deteriorating global strategic stability and the growing risk of nuclear escalation.

For example, [Indonesia](#) reiterated the importance of preserving the integrity of the NPT's three pillars while emphasising the urgent need for tangible progress on nuclear disarmament. Jakarta also stressed that peaceful uses of nuclear technology should remain accessible to developing countries, particularly as states pursue sustainable development and energy transition objectives.

Similarly, [Malaysia](#) expressed concern regarding rising geopolitical tensions and the lack of meaningful advancement toward nuclear disarmament commitments, warning that persistent divisions between nuclear-weapon and non-nuclear-weapon states could weaken confidence in the global non-proliferation regime.

As this year's ASEAN chair and on behalf of the region, [the Philippines](#) called on all nuclear-weapon states to provide unconditional, legally binding negative security assurances and adhere to them; adopt a no-first-use policy regarding nuclear weapons; and take steps to reduce the risks of nuclear weapons use, including those posed by the integration of emerging technologies into nuclear weapons systems.

Securing the Peaceful Use of Nuclear Energy

The security implications are becoming increasingly relevant as Southeast Asian states expand interest in civilian nuclear energy. The Philippines, which is advancing preparations for potential nuclear power deployment and strengthening cooperation on nuclear governance and regulatory capacity, emphasised the importance of balancing peaceful nuclear development with robust safety, safeguards, and security frameworks.

[Indonesia](#), which continues studying nuclear power as part of long-term energy planning, similarly underscored the importance of technical cooperation and international support for peaceful nuclear applications. Meanwhile, [Singapore](#), while not pursuing immediate nuclear power deployment, has intensified assessments of advanced nuclear technologies and consistently highlights the importance of strong international safeguards, nuclear safety, and multilateral cooperation given the transboundary implications of any nuclear incident.

Attacks against civilian nuclear facilities during armed conflict received increasing attention across Southeast Asian national positions. [ASEAN states](#) collectively expressed concern over threats to nuclear safety and security arising from military operations affecting nuclear installations. This issue carries growing relevance for Southeast Asia's future energy landscape.

Countries contemplating nuclear power development, including Vietnam, Indonesia and the Philippines, must increasingly account for risks extending beyond traditional reactor safety. Malaysia and Singapore, which continue to study emerging nuclear technologies and governance requirements, face similar considerations.

Recent conflicts have demonstrated that nuclear facilities may become vulnerable to military attacks, cyber disruptions, sabotage, or broader geopolitical instability. For Southeast Asia, where future civilian nuclear infrastructure could become part of national energy systems, such risks cannot be viewed solely as distant crises. An incident affecting a nuclear facility could produce severe cross-border environmental, humanitarian, and economic consequences – particularly in a geographically interconnected region where transboundary impacts can rapidly spread across national borders.

Consequently, Southeast Asian nuclear energy ambitions must be accompanied by stronger investments not only in regulatory preparedness and safeguards implementation but also in nuclear security, physical protection systems, emergency preparedness mechanisms, and regional crisis coordination. As ASEAN states navigate energy transition pressures alongside an increasingly uncertain strategic environment, the 2026 NPT Review Conference reinforces an emerging reality:

peaceful nuclear development and nuclear security are no longer separate policy domains but increasingly interconnected regional priorities.

Ratifying the Protocol to the SEANWFZ Treaty

Beyond concerns surrounding nuclear safety and the protection of civilian nuclear infrastructure, Southeast Asian states continue to emphasise that sustainable regional security ultimately depends on meaningful progress toward nuclear disarmament, including the long-delayed signing and ratification of the Protocol to the SEANWFZ Treaty by nuclear-weapon states without reservations.

Across national statements and ASEAN's collective statement during the 2026 NPT Review Conference, Southeast Asian countries reiterated longstanding concerns over the slow pace of disarmament implementation, continued nuclear modernisation efforts, and heightened strategic competition among nuclear-weapon states.

Conclusion

For ASEAN member states, preserving the credibility of the NPT requires balanced implementation of its three pillars, namely, non-proliferation, disarmament, and the peaceful uses of nuclear technology. The region has consistently maintained that non-proliferation obligations cannot be separated from commitments to advance nuclear disarmament.

The relevance extends beyond traditional non-proliferation concerns. As Southeast Asian countries explore civilian nuclear energy to strengthen energy security and support decarbonisation efforts, preserving a stable and rules-based regional security environment becomes increasingly important. Nuclear energy ambitions can advance more sustainably when accompanied by strong regional non-proliferation norms, credible international safeguards, robust nuclear security measures, and reduced risks of strategic instability.

The convergence of these priorities – disarmament, non-proliferation, peaceful nuclear development, and protection of civilian nuclear facilities – illustrates why the 2026 NPT Review Conference remains highly consequential for Southeast Asia.

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