

# Top scientists ask UN leaders to act on nuclear weapons, climate change

January 14 2014

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The Science and Security Board of the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* today called on the United States and Russia to restart negotiations on reducing their nuclear arsenals, to lower alert levels for their nuclear weapons, and to scrap their missile defense programs.

The Board also implored world leaders to take immediate action to combat [climate change](#) as it announced that the minute hand of the *Bulletin's* iconic Doomsday Clock will remain at five minutes to midnight because "the risk of civilization-threatening technological catastrophe remains high."

The Board's annual announcement on the status of the Doomsday Clock was addressed this year to United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon and members of the UN Security Council. In the announcement, the *Bulletin's* Board of leading science and security experts acknowledged that 2013 included positive developments in negotiations on the Iranian nuclear program and in the production of renewable energy.

But, the Board noted, those developments came within a "business-as-usual" context that has stalled efforts to shrink nuclear arsenals and reduce climate-altering [greenhouse gas emissions](#). And beyond the threats of [nuclear weapons](#) and climate change lie a host of emerging technological dangers—including cyber weapons and killer robots—that further endanger humanity, the Board said.

"As always, new technologies hold the promise of doing great good, supplying new sources of clean energy, curing disease, and otherwise enhancing our lives. From experience, however, we also know that new technologies can be used to diminish humanity and destroy societies," the Board wrote. "We can manage our technology, or become victims of it. The choice is ours, and the Clock is ticking."

The minute hand of the Doomsday Clock has been at five minutes to midnight since January 2012. In explaining why the hand would remain so close to figurative doomsday, the *Bulletin's* science and security experts focused on the failure of world leaders to take action that would reduce the possibility of catastrophe related to nuclear weapons and climate change.

The Board noted that after Russia offered political asylum to Edward Snowden, the former National Security Agency contractor who leaked US classified documents and created an international media sensation, US President Barack Obama called off a planned summit with Russian leader Vladimir Putin. There appears to have been little movement since on nuclear agreements between the two countries.

The *Bulletin's* experts asked UN leaders to demand that the United States and Russia return to the negotiating table. "Once there," the Board wrote, "they should take the courageous steps needed to further shrink their nuclear arsenals, to scrap their deployment of destabilizing missile defenses, and to reduce the alert levels of their nuclear weapons."

The Board also called on world leaders to show courage in battling domestic political trends that have stalled efforts to address climate change. These trends include serious threats to renewable-energy support in the United States, the European Union, and Australia and are exemplified by Japan's withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol and refusal to honor promises on voluntary greenhouse gas emissions reductions.

"The science on climate change is clear, and many people around the world already are suffering from destructive storms, water and food insecurity, and extreme temperatures," the Board wrote. "It is no longer possible to prevent all climate change, but you can limit further suffering—if you act now."

**More information:** The January 14, 2014 Doomsday Clock decision followed an international symposium held in November 2013 at the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Washington, DC. The Science and Security Board of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, in consultation with the Governing Board and the Board of Sponsors, which includes 18 Nobel Laureates, reviewed the implications of recent events and trends for the future of humanity with input from other experts on nuclear weapons, nuclear energy, climate change, and emerging threats. The Clock hand has been moved 20 times over the past 65 years, since its appearance in 1947 on the first cover of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*.

Click [HERE](#) for the Science and Security Board's Clock announcement.

Click [HERE](#) to watch video of the November Doomsday Clock symposium.

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