

# World leaders warned of existential risks in new report

February 3 2017

---



The Flame of Peace at Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park. Credit: Inefekt69 (Flickr Creative Commons)

World leaders must do more to limit risk of global catastrophes, according to a report by Oxford academics launched at the Finnish Embassy in London today.

The report was carried out by the Future of Humanity Institute (FHI), which is part of the Faculty of Philosophy at Oxford University.

The FHI studies existential risk, which is defined by its director, Professor Nick Bostrom, as a risk "where an adverse outcome would either annihilate Earth-originating intelligent life or permanently and drastically curtail its potential".

Three of the most pressing possible existential risks for humanity are pandemics, extreme climate change, and nuclear war.

So for this report, researchers interviewed experts in these fields and others. Based on these interviews, they have laid out three steps that could reduce these existential risks.

First, the report highlights the importance of regional and global cooperation in planning for pandemics, and putting more effort into planning for extreme diseases.

'As the Ebola and Zika crises showed, managing pandemics is a global responsibility,' says lead author Sebastian Farquhar. 'But too much planning is still national, and little attention is paid to worst-case scenarios including risks from deliberately engineered pathogens.'

Piers Millett, a biosecurity expert at the Future of Humanity Institute, adds: 'A recent survey of the views of national technical experts on biological weapons highlighted a dire need for broader and more sustained international focus on identifying and managing the research most readily applied to causing deliberate harm.'

Secondly, the authors recommend increased attention to the governance of geoengineering research. Geoengineering, including the release of sulphates in the stratosphere to reduce the planet's temperature, is a potentially important tool for managing the impact of climate change. But it requires a fit-for-purpose governance framework to manage risks, which is currently missing.

Finally, the authors call on the international community to explicitly recognise the value of preserving humanity's future and reducing existential risks. A declaration of the responsibilities of current generations to manage risk for the future would help, as would concrete steps to build operational international teams to work on managing catastrophe risk or enshrining specific commitments into international law.

'International cooperation on global risks is more important than ever,' says Sebastian Farquhar. 'Disease, [climate change](#), and nuclear winter don't respect national borders.'

**More information:** The full report, which was supported by the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, can be viewed here: [www.fhi.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/up ... Risks-2017-01-23.pdf](http://www.fhi.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Risks-2017-01-23.pdf)

Provided by University of Oxford

Citation: World leaders warned of existential risks in new report (2017, February 3) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-02-world-leaders-existential.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--