

Why the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Matters to the Philippines: Policy, Public Attitudes, and Peace Advocacy

Gail R. Galang, PhD

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) is one of the most important international agreements aimed at preventing the spread of nuclear weapons, promoting the peaceful use of nuclear technology, and encouraging global nuclear disarmament. Opened for signature in 1968 and entering into force in 1970, the treaty established a framework in which countries without nuclear weapons agree not to develop or acquire them, while countries that already possess nuclear weapons commit to pursuing negotiations toward eventual disarmament. At the same time, the treaty protects the right of states to access nuclear science and technology for peaceful purposes such as medicine, agriculture, research, and energy, under the supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

The Philippines is a signatory to the NPT and has consistently supported its principles through both domestic policy and international diplomacy. The country's commitment to remaining free from nuclear weapons is reinforced by the 1987 Constitution, which reflects a broader national preference for maintaining peace and avoiding involvement in nuclear arms competition. By supporting the treaty, the Philippines contributes to regional stability and strengthens its role within Southeast Asia's nuclear-weapon-free zone. Participation in the NPT also allows the country to benefit from peaceful nuclear applications, particularly in healthcare through radiation therapy for cancer treatment, as well as in agriculture and food safety programs supported by international cooperation.

Although public awareness of the NPT itself is relatively limited among Filipinos, national attitudes generally align with its goals. Surveys and policy discussions suggest that many Filipinos support keeping the country free from nuclear weapons while remaining open to the responsible use of nuclear technology for development needs, especially in addressing energy shortages and improving medical services. However, some concerns remain regarding the safety and environmental risks associated with nuclear facilities, influenced by global nuclear accidents and the country's own historical experience with the unused Bataan Nuclear Power Plant. These mixed views reflect a cautious but pragmatic public outlook that distinguishes between nuclear weapons and peaceful nuclear applications.

Civil society organizations also play an important role in supporting nuclear disarmament and monitoring related developments in the Philippines. Groups such as the Nuclear-Free Philippines Coalition advocate for policies that prevent the presence of nuclear weapons in the country and promote regional peace initiatives. Academic institutions like the Center for Peace Education contribute through public education programs that raise awareness about the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons and encourage youth engagement in peace advocacy. In addition, Philippine partners of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons help connect local advocacy efforts with global movements supporting nuclear disarmament. Overall, while the NPT may not be widely discussed in everyday public discourse, it plays a meaningful role in shaping the Philippines' foreign policy, security commitments, and scientific cooperation. Through its participation in the treaty and the efforts of government institutions and civil society organizations, the Philippines continues to support international efforts to prevent

nuclear weapons proliferation while promoting peaceful uses of nuclear technology for national development and regional stability.

Dr Gail R. Galang, Ph.D. is a peace educator, psychologist, and faculty leader at Miriam College, where she serves as Associate Director of the Center for Peace Education. Her work focuses on promoting empathy, compassion, nonviolent communication, and responsible citizenship through education and community engagement. She has represented Miriam College in local and international peace education initiatives and continues to advocate for a culture of peace through teaching, speaking engagements, and advocacy work.

Photo: Bataan Nuclear Power Plant