

Disarmament Times

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Disarmament Inches Forward in a Period of Setbacks

by Jayantha Dhanapala

While 2002 has certainly had setbacks in disarmament, it is hope and not despair that must guide efforts in the coming year, for the road ahead is difficult, not impassable. There have been a number of modest achievements that indicate the way forward in this vitally important area of international affairs, and the world community should welcome these, just as a one-eyed man is hailed as king in a country of the blind.

Achievements

The achievements of disarmament diplomacy deserving of recognition in 2002 are:

- * The Moscow Treaty (essentially, a de-alerting agreement between the Russian Federation and the United States).
- * Experts from five Central Asian States agreed on the text of a treaty for a nuclear-weapon-free zone (the first entirely north of the Equator).
- * Cuba's decision to join both the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Treaty of Tlatelolco (on the Latin American Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone).
- * The renewal of efforts to strengthen the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) after the collapse of the 2001 Fifth Review Conference, which failed to cap six years of negotiations on a verification protocol. In agreeing to prepare for the Sixth Review Conference (*see separate story*), States Parties could strengthen the BWC and set a foundation for verification arrangements.
- * States parties to the Convention on especially injurious conventional weapons have decided to begin negotiations on explosive remnants of war.
- * The First Preparatory Committee meeting for the 2005 Review Conference of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty went smoothly.
- * Groups of governmental experts on *Missiles and Disarmament and Non-proliferation Education* have submitted significant final reports.

Setbacks

The setbacks have included the loss of the ABM and START II treaties and weakened prospects for the disarmament goals of START III. In addition, the world has witnessed the unveiling of a new doctrine rationalizing the use of nuclear weapons, along with a new strategy for preventive war that embodies a weapons-based approach to security, at a time when some 30,000 nuclear weapons remain in arsenals around the world. There is still no verification Protocol for the Biological Weapons Convention, and progress is very slow on efforts to eliminate chemical weapons. Missile production and proliferation are now growing *pari passu*, along with various missile defence ventures. There were new allegations of non-compliance with the key treaties on weapons of mass destruction. And chronic disagreements in various parts of the UN disarmament machinery - including the Conference on Disarmament and the First Committee -- have prevented the forging of a new consensus on new disarmament initiatives; the Disarmament Commission was not even able to meet in the year of its 50th anniversary.

Reasons for Hope

The reasons we must look ahead with hope despite these serious reversals are grounded on ideals, political will, and hard facts. For every trumpeted allegation of non-compliance with the key WMD treaties, there is a plethora of evidence of general compliance. For every missile test, there are tests that never occurred because of the overwhelming number of states that have rejected such weapons. For every allegation of possible terrorist uses of weapons of mass destruction, there are a multitude of efforts underway nationally and internationally to reduce that risk. For every unit of national currency not spent on weapons, States have found more productive investments.

Nuclear Weapons: We should also take heart in the decline in the overall number of weapons of mass destruction. International leaders and civil society now have the job of working to ensure that the Moscow Treaty will lead to new agreements to eliminate weapons and their nuclear materials. Meanwhile, the IAEA has launched new initiatives to improve the physical security of nuclear materials and to reduce the risk of nuclear terrorism. UN efforts are well underway to confirm that Iraq has complied with its obligations to destroy all of its weapons of mass destruction and discontinue programs for their development.

Funding: While funds for disarmament are scarce, more money is becoming available for non-proliferation. Last June, the G-8 States (the group of the largest industrialized countries); agreed to establish a "global partnership" that will allocate some \$20 billion to halt the global spread of weapons of mass destruction. By highlighting the dangers inherent in such weapons, this initiative helps reinforce the global disarmament norm.

Missiles: A new "International Code of Conduct" on missiles was agreed upon by a large number of States in October. While it did not establish any legal requirements or disarmament obligations, it did recognize that the unfettered development and testing of missiles entailed some real security risks that must be addressed. In time, I hope states will view the ICOC as a first step toward the elimination of all

nuclear-weapon delivery systems, a goal found in the NPT's preamble.

Conventional Weapons: There has been steady progress in implementing the Program of Action of the 2001 UN Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons. The number of countries supplying data to the UN Register of Conventional Arms (now marking its 10th anniversary) has increased steadily.

The Year Ahead

Next year will be the 25th anniversary of the General Assembly's first Special Session on Disarmament. Anticipating that event, the General Assembly has created a working group to consider the goals and agenda for a future special session (the Fourth), including the possibility of establishing a preparatory committee.

The agenda for 2003 must keep its focus on eliminating weapons of mass destruction, curbing the production and sale of conventional weapons in excess of legitimate national needs, devising new ways to curb and eliminate delivery systems, reducing military expenditures (which are now approaching \$1 trillion a year), while expanding resources available to advance disarmament objectives. This is a time not for despair, but for hope and a renewed commitment throughout the world community to move this global disarmament agenda forward. Given existing and prospective threats to international peace and security, none of us can afford to lose a sense of urgency.

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