Civil society perspectives on the Seventh Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty
May 2-27, 2005
A Passing Storm

- Rhianna Tyson, WILPF

Surreal.
Poisonous.
Derisive.
Shameful.

These were some of the adjectives that were used by diplomats and NGOs alike yesterday to describe the atmosphere and mood surrounding the final hours of the NPT Review Conference.

The final negotiations, which consumed the last two days, were focused on an asterisk to the Final Document, which itself is nothing more than a technical report of the meeting.

In the beginning of the Conference, the Non-Aligned (NAM) had fought hard for the inclusion of a reference in the agenda to the 1995 and 2000 Conferences. Having lost that week-and-a-half-long battle, their only recourse was to make a statement that welcomed the adoption of the agenda, noting that it provided an opportunity to include results of previous review conferences and their agreements. At that time, the UK also made a statement, speaking on behalf of the Western Group, which simply welcomed the adoption of the agenda.

Now, two weeks later, the last battle was fought over how, or if, to include references to these statements. For the Non-Aligned, a reference to their statement would ensure a reference—albeit a minor, asterisked one—to past conferences. While such a footnote is a tremendous regression from the triumph of 2000, it would still ensure that those historic agreements would not be entirely negated.

Nonetheless, the Western Group refused to allow even this minute reference to be included in this otherwise worthless Final Document.

After days of closed-door negotiations and debates, the Non-Aligned caved. There will be no asterisk to their statement, and thus no reference whatsoever to 1995 and 2000 in the 2005 Final Document.

NGOs are left in the corridor struggling to understand why. After all, this past month of procedural wrangling was justified on the principle behind the position of the Non-Aligned, rather than the efficacy of their efforts. Obviously a footnote isn't terribly significant in the real world of nuclear weapons; it is not a decisive factor in whether or not a country will disarm or proliferate. The battle, then, was over the principle of the matter. To ignore, then renge, then deny commitments already reached in a multilateral forum serves to not only undermine the Treaty itself, nor just the review process, but rather multilateralism itself. While some hawks may view this past month of procedural quarreling as evidence of the failure of multilateralism, it was multilateralism that the NAM were trying to save.

But then to capitulate at the last minute, to agree to strike out any and all references to the revered past conferences, strips the NAM of their principled position, and tosses them into the anti-multilateralist trap set by the US and others, to whom the erosion of the NPT serves only to further justify unilateral or plurilateral alternatives.

The governments should be embarrassed at the tremendous waste of time, energy and resources that this Conference consumed, and indeed, most diplomats are. Many were walking around in a delirium-like haze, aghast at the futility of their efforts to strengthen the NPT.

Some, however, refused to give up all hope. The Conference did, after all, provide a forum for the exchange of ideas, for the forging of common ground from which to build substantive work in the future. It did facilitate the coming together of almost 2000 NGO representatives, which refuse to allow what happened behind closed doors to erode their determination to see a world free from nuclear weapons.

One diplomat likened this Conference to a thunderstorm—dark, scary and potentially damaging. A thunderstorm, however, also cleanses and nourishes the growth of new life.

This analogy resonates even more strongly with those of us in New York who, for the past week, have been suffering through

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In response to the decision to open the Japanese plutonium reprocessing plant Rokkasho in 2007, the Peace Boat program hosted a panel discussion on May 24th in Conference Room E to discuss the proliferation risks of such a move. The panel featured three speakers who provided a diverse array of arguments against the opening of Rokkasho.

Akira Kawasaki, Program Director of Peace Boat, indicated that Rokkasho would be the first major plutonium reprocessing plant in a Non-Nuclear Weapons State. Rokkasho would separate enough plutonium to build 1000 nuclear weapons per year and run counter to nearly every tenet of Japan’s NPT commitments. Many actors, both in Japan and worldwide, have called for a moratorium on reprocessing, and the opening of Rokkasho would send an extremely contradictory message to the world and “open up the door for a new age of nuclear proliferation.” Kawasaki noted that it is saddening that a country that had been devastated by nuclear weapons would pursue such a reckless policy.

Harold Feiveson, a physicist and arms control writer, highlighted two major concerns with the Rokkasho plant—terrorism and latent proliferation. Feiveson indicated that the plutonium in spent fuel is ‘self-protecting’ because the spent fuel is so highly radioactive that it is immediately lethal to any human being within 5-10 feet of it. Reprocessed plutonium, however, is much less radioactive, which more easily lends itself to the risk of theft. If the Japanese nuclear industry used the reprocessed plutonium as Mixed Oxide fuel (MOX) in light-water reactors, one of the few civilian uses of reprocessed plutonium, the transportation, storage, and reprocessing facilities would all have to be heavily guarded and secured.

Reprocessing plants also run the risk of latent proliferation, which means that a country could acquire nuclear weapons very quickly, catching international safeguards and diplomacy off-guard. The existence of already existing plutonium spares a State the need to build facilities for highly enriched uranium for bombs, which would likely be detected by the IAEA. Add to this the fact that civilian reprocessing is “wildly uneconomic”—uranium prices would have to multiply 25 times in order for reprocessing to be cost-effective, thus eliminating any possible benefit to Rokkasho.

Martin Butcher, Director of Security Programs at Physicians for Social Responsibility, explored the political repercussions of Rokkasho. Butcher argued that Rokkasho would highlight the discrimination on the part of Nuclear Weapons States in terms of who can possess certain sensitive technologies. For example, the United States points a finger at Iran for building reprocessing plants while at the same time remaining silent about Rokkasho. The complicity of NWS in the opening of Rokkasho would strip the non-proliferation regime of its credibility in condemning the suspicious activities of would-be proliferators. Butcher noted that Rokkasho could be a

International Control of Tritium for Nuclear Nonproliferation and Disarmament

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**International Control of Tritium for Nuclear Nonproliferation and Disarmament**

[Image of book cover]
This is a question all of us should be asking ourselves on this last day of the 2005 NPT Review Conference.

Solve this traditional Swedish “Rebus” (however, done in English here) by figuring out what’s on the picture and add or subtract the letters given after each picture. Fill in the sentence you get in the gaps beneath the rebus.

Answer will be published in the Final Edition of the News in Review, due on June 10.

puzzler submitted by Alex Sundberg, WILPF
sort of test case for the movement against reprocessing; if we fail here, we may have lost the chance to limit proliferation-sensitive technology for years to come.

During the ensuing discussion, one participant, a Japanese activist, shed light on why the Japanese nuclear industry would lobby for such an uneconomical and proliferation-inducive project. He indicated that the main concern of the nuclear industry is public opposition to the storage of nuclear waste near their communities. In fact, there are legal limits on how much waste can be stored on-site at nuclear power plants. Rokkasho is built around a pool where nuclear waste can be stored. To avoid public backlash at opening a new waste site, the industry supports the reprocessing plant as political cover for waste storage.

The original plan for Rokkasho, however, was made in the 60s based on the ungrounded global optimism in the efficacy of reprocessing. Since then, the Japanese government was not able to stop the momentum of its construction even after reprocessing turned out to be economically bankrupt. The urgent message of these panelists, therefore, is to neutralize the momentum of Rokkasho before it is too late.

Hongwei Chen is an intern with the Reaching Critical Will project of WILPF UN Office.

Who’s Who: Sarah Estabrooks, Project Ploughshares

Tell us a little about your organization, Project Ploughshares.

Project Ploughshares is an agency of the Canadian Council of Churches and is affiliated with the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies of Conrad Grebel University College at the University of Waterloo. We were founded in 1976, and since then have engaged in research, public engagement, and policy development on peace and security issues including Canadian defense policy, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, humanitarian intervention, nuclear disarmament, ballistic missile defense, the international arms trade, and space security concerns.

You are one of the few representatives from the relatively large Canadian Network to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (CNANW). What is your role here and how do you relate it back to your work in Canada?

Project Ploughshares has been tracking participation in the Step 12 responsibility to submit regular reports on implementation of Article VI and we are both monitoring any debate on reporting and submission of reports, as well as distributing our analysis of reporting from the PrepComs to date. Several CNANW representatives have attended parts of the RevCon and we are working together to translate the developments at the UN for our constituencies in Canada. This has involved sending back regular reports to be distributed on our Canadian listserve. The Review Conference also provides us with a useful opportunity to meet other NGO representatives, distribute our materials, and participate in the side activities.

Are you pleased with Canada’s role at this Conference and other international disarmament fora? What more (or less) would you like to see from your government?

In the past, Canada has played a role of leadership, bridging the gap between the NATO states and the New Agenda Coalition. In the impossible climate of this Review Conference, Canada’s support for substantive and tangible progress on specific issues such as strengthening the NPT’s institutional framework and transparency and accountability measures falls within the ‘accomplishable’. We have cooperated in this work, particularly on the reporting and NGO access issues, and are supportive of this.

If the Liberal government should collapse, what types of changes should we expect from official Canadian policy?

The Canadian political climate is in a unique state where the minority Liberal government is being challenged and we are not sure whether this government will survive. The scenario of a minority government, however, can result in positive developments. A minority government must compromise with opposition parties and work in coalition, and this situation was one of the contributors to the recent decision by...
We who are working for security and justice in the world join the demand for the elimination of nuclear weapons. We understand, however, that the abolition of nuclear weapons will not by itself deliver peace and security to the people of the world.

Organizing to abolish nuclear weapons is a significant moral and ethical undertaking that inherently defies the status quo. Because nuclear weapons are so closely bound to the power of the governments which hold them, promoting open public debate regarding nuclear weapons policies requires us to question state authority directly. Thus, efforts to abolish nuclear weapons can lead to citizens reclaiming sovereignty over society’s decision-making processes, and hence to an expansion and reinvigoration of democracy.

Secrecy plays a major role in preserving the undemocratic power of the nuclear weapons state. Secrecy is the enemy of democracy. It shields decisions regarding nuclear issues and helps to concentrate power in the hands of a few institutions and small numbers of people.

Democracy demands tearing down the barriers of secrecy that surround nuclear weapons policies. A movement to eliminate nuclear weapons must consider systematically the means for reestablishing democracy. The process for getting rid of the bomb will both require and make possible increased openness, truthfulness, cooperation and citizen participation.

The Abolitionist movement in the 19th century was focused on the elimination of slavery. But its participants were aware as well of the need to transform the power and wealth-driven politics that maintained slavery. The global system of corporate economic dominance now being consolidated depends in part on the threat of the bomb to “stabilize” and secure the global market place under the umbrella of continued United States leadership. But far from bringing security, this brandishing of annihilation in the service of endless material accumulation sows seeds of violence, insecurity and injustice at home and around the world.

The brave women and men who opposed slavery knew that its elimination would not automatically create a just and secure future. They advocated reorganizing the social, political and economic realities of America. Similarly, we must understand that eliminating nuclear weapons alone will not transform a society corroded by racism, poverty, prison growth, decaying school systems, unemployment, violence against women and children, inadequate health care and homelessness. Only by tackling these social conditions will we be able to create a sustainable future and a world without war. Building a movement for the abolition of nuclear weapons in the United States provides us with the opportunity to join together with the growing international peace and justice community that is linking the abolition of nuclear weapons to the abolition of economic exploitation and institutional oppression. Securing a livable world requires a broad social commitment to understanding, and then transforming, the structures of power and domination, just as the Abolitionists of the 19th century named and confronted the slaveocracy.

A movement which aims to abolish nuclear weapons must be prepared to address the political and economic inequities that nuclear weapons help to sustain. Otherwise we will likely be faced with a grim choice of futures: either we will fail to achieve our goals because those in power continue to find nuclear weapons useful in sustaining their privilege, or we will merely help smooth the transition to a world dominated by more technologically efficient and somewhat less indiscriminate forms of military power.

Today we are witnessing an accelerated disintegration of both human communities and our natural environment. Nuclear weapons, like slavery, are symptoms of social degradation and a climate of fear and confusion which have much deeper roots. History teaches today’s Abolitionists that the road to world security, justice, and to the abolition of nuclear weapons must lead as well to a fundamental reconstruction of our economy and our politics.

Working draft of US nuclear abolitionists meeting in Santa Barbara, California, February 14, 1999.

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What’s On: Calendar of Events

Daily morning interfaith prayer vigil
Where: Ralph Bunche Park, 42nd Street, 1st Avenue
When: May 2-27, 7:30 AM
Contact: Caroline Gilbert, Christian Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament

Abolition 2000 Morning Caucus
Where: UN Conference Room E
When: Daily, 10 AM-11 AM
Contact: Monika Szymurska, Global Coordinator

Legal, technical and political steps to a nuclear weapons free world: A Nuclear Weapons Convention?
Where: Conference Room 7
When: 9 AM
Contact: Alyn Ware, PNND

Faith and the Future: The Inter-Religious Community and the Struggle for Nuclear Abolition
Where: UN Church Center, First Avenue at 44th Street
When: 2 PM Church Center for the United Nations
Contact: Ibrahim Ramey, Disarmament Coordinator at FOR, Tel: 845-358-4601E-mail: disarm@forusa.org

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A collaborative undertaking by the NGO Working Group on the First Committee, the Monitor has been hailed by diplomats, UN staffs and activists as one of the most useful resources produced during the General Assembly. HTML versions include easy-to-use hyperlinks to all governmental statements, while PDF versions include important announcements, spotlights and more.

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Canada not to join the US ballistic missile defense (BMD) program. Strong opposition from key potential coalition parties factored into the decision, along with strong public opposition. Canada’s legacy as a promoter of arms control and disarmament is unlikely to be dramatically changed should there be a change in government. A Conservative leadership would likely, however, favour closer alignment with US policy and prioritize continental security. In that case, the BMD decision might be revisited.

What is your take on this Review Conference and the quagmire of procedure? Are these procedural disagreements worthwhile?

The procedural debate that delayed substantive work was clearly rooted in much deeper disagreement about the priorities and directions this conference should take. It is so frustrating from the outside to see the conference hijacked by negotiations over an agenda. The procedural challenges throughout this Review Process suggest that the structure itself is not working. Canada’s proposal for a reorganizing of the review process to have annual meetings, which would increase the regularity of meeting and provide increased opportunity to address problems and assess progress, has resonance in light of the past month. It is inconceivable in any other institution that three weeks of working time could be misused in this way, and yet there does not seem to be the political will to strengthen the NPT framework and institute the necessary changes to make it function effectively.

What do you think is needed- from both governments and NGOs- to make the best use of this Conference?

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unseasonably cold and rainy weather, a perfectly poetical climatic reflection of the gloomy and dismal atmosphere in the basement of the UN. Today, however, the weather report tells us to expect the first warm and sunny day that New Yorkers have seen in a while.

Conferences fail. Talks end up in collapse. Hard-won agreements are flushed away by the will of a single government. But governments change, and with them, the policies that nurture- or wreck- diplomatic opportunities change, too. Today, the thunderstorm of this Review Conference will finally pass, just as the clouds will part above the United Nations building. Given the lack of substantive, transparent progress in the governmental meetings of this conference, civil society, whose efforts here this month did sprout new ideas for reducing nuclear disarmament, will grow stronger after the rain.