

# disarmament bodies

**This factsheet briefly outlines the work undertaken by three key international disarmament fora: the Conference on Disarmament (Geneva); the Disarmament Commission (New York); and the United Nations General Assembly 1st Committee**

## THE CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

The Conference on Disarmament (CD) is the world's sole multilateral disarmament treaty negotiating body.

While the CD is independent of the United Nations, its secretary is appointed by the UN Secretary-General; it is required to consider recommendations from the General Assembly; and it submits reports at least annually to the UN General Assembly in Geneva.

### THE EMERGENCE OF THE CD:

A brief time-line of the emergence of the current CD follows:

- March 1962: established as the Eighteen Nations Disarmament Committee (ENDC) with 18 members, jointly chaired by USA and USSR
- 1969: became the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament (CCD) with 30 members, jointly chaired by USA and USSR
- 1983: became the Conference on Disarmament (CD) with 38 members
- June 1996: CD expanded membership to 61 members
- 1999: CD expanded membership to 66 countries

### GROUPINGS WITH THE CD:

Groupings among the members include:

- The Western Group
- The Non-Aligned Movement (also known as the G21)
- The Group of Eastern European States and Others
- The P5 (the 5 permanent members of the Security Council, the 5 declared nuclear weapons states)
- The P4 (the five minus China)
- China often refers to itself as the Group of One.

### CD SESSIONS TIME TABLE:

The CD has three sessions each year.

The first begins in the second-last week of January and lasts for 10 weeks; the second begins in May and lasts seven weeks; and the third in July and lasts seven weeks.

The CD holds one public plenary per week, although if appropriate, more may be held.

### CHAIR OF THE CD:

The chair of the Conference rotates every four working weeks following the English alphabetical list of membership.

### AGENDAS AND DECISION MAKING IN THE CD:

The CD has a permanent agenda, also known as the Decalogue, which includes the following:

- 1.Nuclear weapons in all aspects
- 2.Chemical weapons [removed from the agenda in 1993 after the CD completed the Chemical Weapons Convention on 3 September 1992]
- 3.Other weapons of mass destruction
- 4.Conventional weapons
- 5.Reduction of military budgets
- 6.Reduction of armed forces
- 7.Disarmament and development
- 8.Disarmament and international security
- 9.Collateral measures; confidence building measures; effective verification methods in relation to appropriate disarmament measures, acceptable to all parties
- 10.Comprehensive programme of disarmament leading to general and complete disarmament under effective international control

Most items on the CD agenda are discussed in ad hoc committees, held in private. The whole conference must agree by consensus to the mandate given to ad

### Information sources:

★ Documents are available by contacting the secretariat of the Special NGO Committee on Disarmament (WILPF) or by calling the Documentation and Conference Officer, Mlle Editta Pasqualin at + 41 22 917 3036. [www.unog.ch/frames/disarm/disdoc.htm](http://www.unog.ch/frames/disarm/disdoc.htm)

★ see [www.reachingcriticalwill.org](http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org) for links to UN bodies

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hoc committees.

## THE DISARMAMENT COMMISSION

(UNDC)

### THE EMERGENCE OF THE COMMISSION:

The Disarmament Commission was set up by the final document of the 1978 Special Session on Disarmament (also known as SSOD1) as a deliberative body, a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly with universal membership.

### COMMISSION TIMETABLE:

The SSOD2 document directed it to meet for not more than four weeks in 1979 and this regimen has been followed for succeeding years, with one exception in 1988. Members hold a brief organizational meeting in December of the preceding year at the conclusion of the UN General Assembly.

### AGENDAS AND DECISION MAKING:

The UNDC has no specific agenda, its mandate is to, “consider and make recommendations on various problems in the field of disarmament and to follow up on relevant decisions” of SSOD1. Its recommendations are made to the General Assembly and it decides mostly by consensus.

In 1991, due to accusations that the Commission was ineffective, the UNDC agreed that no item should remain on the agenda for more than three consecutive years, and for each annual session the agenda should contain no more than four substantive items. During the 1991—93 sessions, the UNDC succeeded in completing only two agenda items. During the 1994—95 sessions, the UNDC was unable to reach consensus on three agenda items.

At its 92nd plenary meeting, on 8 September 1998, the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the First Committee, recalling its resolution 52/12 B of 15 December 1997, and bearing in mind the need to enhance the efficient functioning of the Disarmament Commission, decided that the DC should continue to play a unique role within the mechanism on disarmament as the only body with universal membership for in-depth deliberations on relevant disarmament issues.

They also decided that the substantive agenda of the Disarmament Commission should normally comprise two agenda items per year from the whole range of disarmament issues, including one on nuclear disarmament. The possibility of a third agenda item would be retained if there was a consensus to adopt such an item, and that parallel meetings of its subsidiary bodies should be avoided.

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Information sources:

- ★ [www.un.org/Depts/dda/UNDC/UNDC.htm](http://www.un.org/Depts/dda/UNDC/UNDC.htm)
- ★ see also [www.reachingcriticalwill.org](http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org) for links to UN bodies

Substantive agenda items should be considered in the Disarmament Commission for three years.

## THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY FIRST COMMITTEE

The United Nations General Assembly has set up six committees, one of which, the First Committee, handles Disarmament and International Security matters including the regulation of armaments. It meets in New York.

### COMMITTEE TIMETABLE:

Sessions of the General Assembly begin in New York on the third Tuesday of September and the First Committee usually begins in October.

### AGENDAS AND DECISION MAKING:

Any member can introduce an item and the First Committee deals with about 25—50 items per year. The Committee passes its recommendations on to the General Assembly (each UN member is automatically a member of the First Committee) to vote as a resolution.

In recent years, the First Committee has completed voting by the middle of November and the General Assembly has voted on First Committee draft resolutions in the first part of December. The First Committee makes decisions by a simple majority; the General Assembly decides important questions, such as recommendations on peace and security, by a two thirds vote, but other questions by a simple majority.

The First Committee handles most topics which are the subject of negotiations elsewhere such as a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, chemical weapons, biological weapons, conventional arms sales, arms race in outer space and related topics.

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Information sources:

- ★ [www.un.org/ga/54/first/first.htm](http://www.un.org/ga/54/first/first.htm)
- ★ see [www.reachingcriticalwill.org](http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org) for links to UN bodies

The very first resolution of the UN General Assembly unanimously called for the “elimination from national armaments of atomic weapons and of all other major weapons adaptable to mass destruction.”

