



Commitment to Disarmament Is Key to NPT Success

IPPNW Statement at 2003 NPT PrepCom

The second NPT Preparatory Committee Conference (PrepCom) before the 2005 Review Conference took place from April 28 to May 9, 2003 in Geneva, Switzerland. IPPNW participated at the PrepCom with a coalition of NGOs advocating for nuclear disarmament.

IPPNW published the following position paper in advance of the PrepCom. On April 30, former IPPNW Co-President Victor W. Sidel, MD presented a paper on the medical and environmental consequences of nuclear earth penetrating weapons, nuclear testing, and depleted uranium weapons.

The entire nuclear non-proliferation regime for which the Non-Proliferation Treaty provides the foundation is in danger of collapse. The “modest but important progress toward the goal of nuclear disarmament” to which IPPNW referred in its statement presented to the First PrepCom in 2002 is no longer in evidence. Although one State—Cuba—acceded to the NPT in 2002, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea not only withdrew from the Treaty in 2003 but restarted plutonium reprocessing facilities that give it the capacity to manufacture nuclear weapons should its leadership decide to do so. India and Pakistan, still not parties to the NPT, have exchanged nuclear threats frequently since acquiring their own nuclear arsenals in 1998.

During the US-Soviet Cold War, nuclear proliferation was largely driven by the pyrrhic race for nuclear supremacy between those superpowers. Today, the principal driver behind the dangerous tendency toward increased proliferation in other countries is the nuclear policy of the United States articulated by the Bush administration in the Nuclear Posture Review and in budget requests submitted to the Congress since 2001. Far from reflecting the commitment to an “unequivocal undertaking” to eliminate its nuclear weapons that the US – along with the other nuclear weapon states – embraced at the 2000 NPT Review Conference, US nuclear policy envisions a permanent nuclear arsenal, including new nuclear weapon designs, that effectively repudiates its disarmament obligations under the NPT.

Particularly troublesome is the emerging US nuclear doctrine that proposes a combat role for nuclear weapons as earth-penetrating “bunker busters,” accompanied by budget requests that seem to prepare the way for the development and production of these “advanced design” weapons. While International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) has consistently rejected the logic of deterrence as the justification for the ownership of nuclear weapons, deterrence theory at least started from the premise that nuclear weapons must never be used. The US appears poised to abandon that premise in the pursuit of low-yield, precision nuclear weapons that are designed for battlefield use not only against hardened underground bunkers but in a variety of battlefield situations where their use has not been seriously contemplated since the first few years of the nuclear age. In March 2003, IPPNW released an important new study on the medical consequences of nuclear EPWs, refuting claims that they can be used with minimal “collateral damage.”

IPPNW is also deeply concerned with those aspects of US nuclear policy, as articulated in excerpts from the Nuclear Posture Review that have come into the public domain, that blur the distinction between nuclear and non-nuclear weapons. We refer particularly to depleted uranium weapons that have been used extensively in at least four armed conflicts prosecuted by the US during the past several years. Evidence is mounting that the radiological and toxic contamination

caused by DU is associated with serious illnesses among civilian populations and military personnel. Nevertheless, US commitment to the use of DU in armor-piercing shells and in other munitions is arguably an attempt to inure the public to the presence of radiation on the battlefield as a precursor to the use of nuclear weapons themselves. Even the perception that this is so among States feeling that they must develop defenses against attack with DU weapons has implications for proliferation and the NPT.

Distinctions between nuclear and non-nuclear missions are being blurred as well. US nuclear policymakers speak more openly of using nuclear weapons to “deter” the use of chemical and biological weapons. Moreover, the NPR reportedly names five non-nuclear weapon states as potential targets of US nuclear weapons, as part of a strategy to “deter” terrorism. Such targetting would clearly violate the principal of “negative security assurances” embedded in the NPT.

Development of new nuclear weapon designs, should it go forward, would almost certainly require a resumption of underground nuclear test explosions by the US. Were it to break the testing moratorium that has been in place for more than 10 years, the US would signal that it was “ramping up” to build an all new nuclear arsenal for the 21st century. In that event, the unravelling of the non-proliferation regime would be a foregone conclusion as more and more countries reject the nuclear double standard and decide to acquire or strengthen their own “deterrent.”

The States parties to the NPT at this PrepCom must confront a stark choice between two futures: one in which the nuclear double standard fails because the non-nuclear weapon states finally reject the claim that nuclear weapons are good in some hands but not in others; or one in which the double standard is abandoned because the nuclear weapon states finally accept that the weapons themselves are unacceptable in anyone’s hands. This latter belief has been at the core of the NPT from its inception and the principal goal of the PrepCom must be to restore it to the center of disarmament discussions.

IPPNW continues to support specific policy recommendations that were adopted at the 2000 NPT Review Conference and that were echoed at the First PrepCom in 2002. These include bringing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) into force; negotiating and adopting a verifiable Nuclear Weapons Convention; de-alerting existing nuclear weapons; implementing a fissile materials ban; continuing to establish nuclear weapons free zones around the world; reducing reliance on nuclear energy and investing in renewable energies; and increasing funding for IAEA safeguards activities and reducing the IAEA role in promoting nuclear energy.

Without a clear commitment by all the States parties to the NPT to its fundamental purpose, however, such steps as these can have only marginal effect. In our view, the commitment to disarmament by the largest nuclear weapon state, which in the end will make or break the NPT, is nowhere in evidence. The highest priority at this PrepCom and at the 2005 Review must be to call into question those aspects of US nuclear policy that appear to contradict the “unequivocal undertaking” and to ensure that these genocidal weapons retain the global opprobrium they deserve as we continue on the path toward their rapid and complete elimination.

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