

## NPT Support Strong Despite Bad News

By Douglas Roche

When the 2005 Review Conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty ended in disarray, lamentation filled the air. The mood worsened when world leaders at the UN 60th Anniversary Summit stripped their declaration of any reference to nuclear disarmament. A general impression developed that the nuclear weapons situation is, if not exactly hopeless, so conflicted that meaningful progress in disarmament is stymied. The ongoing crisis of Iran and the controversial US-India deal on nuclear technology have apparently sapped all the energy, not to mention media attention, out of the system.

The *Middle Powers Initiative* takes a different view. Not for a moment do we under-estimate the seriousness of the present threat to the viability of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. But we recognize that the obduracy of a small number of States, important as they are, is obscuring the clear desire of the vast majority of States to advance the nuclear disarmament agenda.

Consider the elements on which there was wide support at the 2005 NPT Review Conference: stop nuclear sharing; prevent nuclear terrorism through total elimination of nuclear weapons; build upon the decisions and commitments of 1995 and 2000; maintain the nuclear testing moratorium; respect negative security assurances; strengthen nuclear weapons-free zones. There is, then, a solid basis for stating that a viable plan for progress in nuclear disarmament exists.

This view led the Middle Powers Initiative to launch the *Article VI Forum*. As the name suggests (Article VI of the NPT deals with the disarmament of the nuclear-weapon States), MPI

believes a balance is necessary between non-proliferation and getting rid of existing weapons. The object of the Forum is to encourage like-minded States to carry forward the substantive work of the 2005 NPT Review Conference.

When the Forum was launched at a meeting at the UN on October 3, 2005, broad support for this initiative was expressed. The then Under-Secretary-General Nobuyasu Abe welcomed the Forum as an example of the "new and creative thinking" on disarmament and non-proliferation called for by General Assembly President Jan Eliasson.

A second, two-day meeting was held March 2-3, 2006 at The Hague. Twenty-one invited States participated: Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, Germany, the Holy See, Hungary, Ireland, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, South Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, and Turkey.

The meeting, co-hosted by the Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael,' opened up a

new approach to nuclear disarmament by examining key legal, political and technical issues that need to be addressed to overcome security concerns of the nuclear weapons States.

The Forum was addressed by two former Prime Ministers - Ruud Lubbers of the Netherlands and Kim Campbell of Canada - former New Zealand Disarmament Minister Marian Hobbs, Ambassador Abe, and Tariq Rauf, Head of Verification and Security Policy Coordination for the IAEA. A special feature was a presentation of the draft report of the new International Panel on Fissile Materials, headed by Frank Von Hippel of the U.S. and Jose Goldemberg of Brazil.

A third meeting of the Article VI Forum is scheduled for Ottawa next September. Representatives of the nuclear-weapon States will be invited to a special dialogue.

Where is all this work leading? In the near term, the Article VI Forum aims to stimulate constructive work on disarmament and non-proliferation steps in order to reduce nuclear dangers and pave the way for a successful 2010 NPT Review Conference. This will send a positive message to a waiting world that serious work on nuclear disarmament is being done.

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