



2015 REV CON WAS VERY DISAPPOINTING BOTH IN TERMS OF PRODUCT AND PROCESS

To the Editor-in-Chief,

The outcome of the 2015 NPT Review Conference adjourned on May 22 in New York came to me as no surprise; nor did the fact that consensus broke down over the Middle East. The initial Arab League Document, pushed through by Egypt, was a very poor starting point for negotiations, and was not welcomed even by a number of Arab League states. Although the United States, the UK, and Canada took the floor to express their inability to support the draft Final Document circulated at a very late date by the Conference president, in fact her draft enjoyed only lukewarm support by most delegations — especially on the disarmament language — and many delegations appeared actually relieved by the conference outcome.

The Draft Final Document did contain some useful new elements, including support for a new mandate for an Open Ended Working Group, but overall the document was not very progressive, and no party was very enthusiastic about its contents, which was by definition the product of a lowest common denominator consensus process. What I found particularly unsatisfactory was the almost perfunctory reference to the 2010 Action Plan. Indeed, the 2015 NPT Draft Final Document could have been negotiated with or without any Action Plan, and in some respects was weaker than the one adopted in 2010.

The US was far more flexible on most of the contentious issues during the Review Conference than the other nuclear weapons states. It also had much less difficulty accepting the disarmament provisions negotiated in the small group led by Ambassador Laggner than did countries such as France and Russia. As such, I don't see the stance it took at the Rev Con significantly altering its policy in other fora. The one possible exception may be greater openness to the idea of an Open-Ended Working Group if that approach is put forward by other states during the next meeting of the General Assembly.

Generally speaking the 2015 Rev Con was very disappointing both in terms of product and process. Having participated in every Rev Con since 1995, I would rank this one near the bottom of the list, only slightly above that fro 2005. Indeed, there were important similarities between 2015 and 2005. In both instances, a number of key states — especially Egypt — pursued very damaging obstructionist tactics, and there was little sense of common purpose among the delegates. More so than most conferences, I also felt



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the majority of the time spent in Plenary and MC sessions had little impact on the draft Final Document.

I actually believe that many NNWS — and especially those within NAM — were relieved by the failure to reach a consensus document. Although most of these countries were not prepared to speak up publicly to express their opposition to the disarmament provisions in the Draft Final Document, their lack of enthusiasm for the text was apparent in both what was said and what was not said in the closing national statements. My guess is that some will use the failure of the Rev Con to adopt consensus language as an additional impetus for seeking alternative venues to pursue the Humanitarian Impact initiative. While the outcome of the latest Rev Con certainly will not narrow the divisions among different political groupings, it highlights the divides within as well as between the groups. This was especially apparent in the decision by Indonesia to give up its position as Coordinator of the NAM Disarmament Working Group over frustration with the lack of support it received from other NAM members at the Third International Nuclear Weapon Free Zone Conference, immediately prior to the Rev Con. 🐘

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