

UN Verification Study Completed

The year 1990 saw the conclusion of a UN study in which Canada played a key role. On December 7, 1988, the UN General Assembly adopted resolution 43/81B, which authorized the creation of a Group of Governmental Experts to "undertake a study on the role of the UN in verification." Specifically, the Group was to:

- identify and review existing UN activities in the verification of arms control and disarmament agreements;
- assess the need for improvements in existing activities as well as explore and identify possible additional activities, taking into account organizational, technical, operational, legal and financial aspects; and
- provide specific recommendations for future UN action in this context.

Canada was instrumental in the adoption of the resolution and, as a reflection of Canada's high international profile on verification issues, the Group chose Mr. Fred Bild — then Assistant Deputy Minister of the Political and International Security Branch of EAITC — to be its Chairperson.

The Group's 20 members, who acted in their own capacities rather than as representatives of their respective governments, undertook a thorough examination of verification issues. The resulting study is arguably the most comprehensive and authoritative treatment of the UN's involvement in verification — and of multilateral verification in general — in existence. Over the coming years, the chapters exploring the underlying generic, conceptual and technical aspects of verification may well prove to be the most useful of the entire exercise, as the absence of an agreed survey of this material has long contributed to misunderstandings of the terms and concepts involved.

The section of the study most likely to generate immediate interest is the final one, which contains the Group's recommendations. These were the subject of intense discussion among the experts — discussion that reflected essentially two different conceptions of the most

productive future role for the UN in verification.

According to one view, the UN's primary importance in verification lies in its ability to disseminate information and to act as an equalizer of opportunities. All experts agreed that the UN could and should play a useful role in activities designed to promote this end, such as compiling and maintaining an up-to-date verification database and sponsoring a series of practical workshops on verification intended to bring together diplomats, technicians and academics.

According to another view, the UN could more valuably involve itself in actual verification activities through the creation of a standing verification agency. On this point, there was wide disagreement. Some were of the opinion that a standing UN verification agency should be created immediately. Such an agency, they argued, would provide a ready-made mechanism for the verification of future arms control and disarmament treaties. Others took the opposite view. They reasoned that the UN could not create an agency, and endow it with sufficient technical and personnel resources to verify potential arms control and disarmament agreements, in the absence of a treaty-related mandate for such services. Quite apart from the considerable costs involved, it was suggested that the question of what the agency would do in the absence of a specific need for its expertise could not be adequately answered.

In the end, the Group agreed to differ on this question. Their extensive discussions on the subject are fully reflected in the study. The Group did agree that an immediate, hands-on verification role with respect to certain arms control and disarmament agreements does exist for the UN, in terms of the Secretary-General's "fact-finding" powers. The Group recommended that these powers be strengthened.

The Group's study was forwarded to the Secretary-General on July 13, 1990. The Secretary-General, in turn, forwarded the study to the General Assembly for consideration in the First Committee. Canada, acting with its traditional partners (France and the Netherlands), drafted a resolution welcoming the study and calling upon the UN Secretariat to implement its recommendations. The resolution was adopted by consensus.

Now that the study has been officially welcomed by the General Assembly, the task of implementing its recommendations can begin. Although the main responsibility for action rests with the UN Secretariat, the Group recognized that individual member states could render invaluable assistance. Canada has already pledged to cooperate with the Secretariat in this regard. For example, the considerable research holdings of EAITC's Verification Research Unit will be made available to the Secretariat as it strives to establish the data bank called for in the recommendations. Canada will be examining other ways in which it can assist the Secretariat in the months ahead. ■



The UN Group of Experts on Verification at a workshop in Canada in July 1989.