

The United Nations wasted no time coming to terms with the issue of disarmament. The very first resolution adopted by the General Assembly, on January 24, 1946, sought to eliminate atomic weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. Since then, the United Nations has been the main global forum for disarmament talks and agreements.

The end of the Cold War has brought a new mood to the UN; member states are now willing to work together to reach arms control agreements. Many UN bodies, from the Security Council to small ad hoc groups, have a hand in dealing with disarmament issues. However, most arms control initiatives are dealt with through three UN organs:

The *First Committee* meets in New York each fall. It puts together draft resolutions on disarmament that are then considered by the General Assembly.

The *UN Disarmament Commission (UNDC)* gathers in New York every spring and examines a smaller number of items in greater detail. In 1994, the list included nuclear disarmament, the role of science and technology, and international arms transfers. The main function of these groups (i.e. the First Committee and the UNDC) is to discuss issues. Through study and the exchange of ideas, they develop common viewpoints, expressions of intent, and guidelines for action.

In contrast, the role of the Geneva-based *Conference on Disarmament (CD)* is more practical: its purpose is to negotiate treaties. Thirty-nine states form the membership of the CD, which reports to the General Assembly and is funded by the UN. However, the CD sets its own agenda and does not have to follow General Assembly recommendations.

Disarmament has always been a major theme of Canada's involvement in the United Nations. Canada is working through all three UN disarmament groups to try to find solutions to a number of problems.

Nuclear Non-Proliferation

The end of the Cold War changed the world. With the superpower rivalry no longer dominating affairs, the way was open for regional tensions to increase. The way was also opened to resolving many regional conflicts. As local stability has declined, some states have become more interested in acquiring nuclear weapons as a means of ensuring their security. Controlling the spread of such weapons has become a major goal for Canada and most of its international partners.

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) came into force in 1970. It is the main agreement through which the spread of nuclear weapons is controlled. The NPT limits the number of states that may develop and possess nuclear weapons to five (the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France and China). Countries that do not have nuclear weapons are required to give up the chance to possess them, and must submit to inspections of their nuclear facilities, such as electricity generating stations, by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). So far, more than 165 nations have become parties to the NPT.

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