

# The UN Disarmament Conference and Canada

by Robert W. Reford

The prospects of success for the Second United Nations Special Session on Disarmament (UNSSOD II) have increased substantially in the last six months, and this can be attributed almost entirely to public pressure rather than government policies. It is still unlikely that the world will be any less armed when the session is over at the end of July. There will probably be no new agreements for specific measures to reduce or control arms. But there does seem to be a real chance that the groundwork will be laid for future action.

There are signs too that opportunities are open to countries which have both the political experience and the technical expertise to put forward constructive proposals. Canada is such a country. It has been a member of every United Nations (UN) negotiating group on disarmament since the organization was established. (The UN has traditionally used the word "disarmament" to cover all questions relating to the control, regulation or destruction of armaments. The experts differentiate between "disarmament" and "arms control.") In some special fields such as chemical warfare and the identification of underground nuclear tests, Canadian scientists are recognized as among the world's leaders.

The chance for the smaller powers to contribute has arisen because the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, have yet to resume a serious dialogue in the field of strategic arms control. After a year and a half in office, the Reagan administration is still eyeing the Kremlin warily, while Leonid Brezhnev seems to be trying to size up the President. So far, they have done little but put forward ideas which they were virtually certain would be rejected.

As this is written, it is not even sure whether the two leaders will both attend UNSSOD II and if they do, whether they will meet, formally or informally. They will, perhaps, have a real summit in October.

## **General Assembly in special session**

UNSSOD II will be a session of the General Assembly, and the Assembly is designed to provide an opportunity for general debate and the exchange of ideas.

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Its resolutions are not binding though they have behind them the weight of a majority of the nations of the world. However, since it is concerned with one special subject, this session could serve as the occasion to announce the successful negotiation of some international agreements on disarmament or arms control. One of the disappointments of UNSSOD I in 1978 was that this did not happen. Unfortunately, there is little evidence that it will happen this year either. Of course, UN member-states have their own concerns which they will certainly voice at a session of the General Assembly. Thus, one can expect to hear vigorous debates on the policies of Israel and South Africa, and the need for a new international economic order, even though at times these may seem rather remote from disarmament. No doubt the Falkland Islands will be brought up as well.

The preliminary agenda for UNSSOD II contains one item couched in language which obviously represents an attempt to take account of everyone's special concerns. It calls for a general debate, including:

"Review and appraisal of the present international situation in the light of the pressing need for specific generally agreed measures to eliminate the danger of war, in particular nuclear war, halt and reverse the arms race and to achieve substantial progress in the field of disarmament, especially its nuclear aspects, taking due account of the close inter-relationship between disarmament, international peace and security, as well as between disarmament and economic and social development, particularly of the developing countries."

## **UNSSOD I**

The first special session produced a Final Document which is remarkable. Its 129 paragraphs include an introduction which discusses the relationship between disarmament and security; a declaration of principles for disarmament; a program of action listing specific steps that should be taken; and recommendations concerning UN machinery for disarmament debate and negotiation. Its greatest accomplishment was that it was adopted by consensus. In other words, none of the 149 member-states present was prepared to vote against. Some may have had some reservations about some sections, but these were subordinated to what was considered more important, the approval of what amounted to a new charter for disarmament.

The ultimate objective, of course, is general and com-