

ly for another vote. Since the members of the First Committee are the same as the members of the General Assembly, you might expect the voting results would be the same. However, since the goal is to reach consensus, supporters of a resolution sometimes try to convince non-supporters to change "no" votes to abstentions or abstentions to "yes" votes. As a result, the General Assembly voting can differ slightly from the voting in the First Committee.

At the 1991 session of the General Assembly, Member States adopted 44 resolutions dealing with disarmament, 27 of them by consensus. The resolutions and the voting results are listed on pages 6 and 7.

2. Disarmament Commission

The UN Disarmament Commission (UNDC) meets in New York for approximately three weeks every spring. All members of the UN can participate in the UNDC. The UNDC looks at a much smaller number of disarmament items than the First Committee does and considers these items in more detail. At its May 1991 session, the UNDC discussed the following items: (1) objective information in military matters; (2) nuclear disarmament; (3) regional disarmament; and (4) the role of science and technology in international security and disarmament.

The goal of the UNDC is not to produce resolutions on each item, but to agree on a statement or a set of recommendations. Unlike the First Committee, the UNDC takes its decisions by consensus, not by vote. This means that all Member States must agree to the statement; a majority is not enough.

3. Conference on Disarmament

The Conference on Disarmament (CD) meets each year in Geneva, Switzerland, for about six months. Thirty-nine countries belong to the CD, including Canada. The role of the CD is to negotiate disarmament treaties. It can also set up special committees and working groups to study disarmament issues. Since 1980, the CD has been negotiating a treaty that would ban the development, production, stockpiling, possession and use of chemical weapons. The

CD is also looking at other issues, including a nuclear test ban and how to prevent an arms race in outer space. Like the UNDC, the CD can take decisions only when consensus exists. The CD reports to the General Assembly and gets its budget from the UN, but it sets its own agenda and does not have to follow General Assembly recommendations.

4. Disarmament Treaties

A number of arms control and disarmament agreements have been reached through UN initiatives. Examples include the Antarctic Treaty, the Partial Test Ban Treaty, the Outer Space Treaty and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The UN regularly organizes conferences where parties can review these treaties.

5. Special Sessions on Disarmament

The UN General Assembly has held three Special Sessions on Disarmament, in 1978, 1982 and 1988. The 149 states that participated in the first Special Session — known as UNSSOD I — agreed on a Final Document calling for an end to the arms race and a reduction in arms. The Final Document contained a Program of Action to help bring this about. The Second Special Session (UNSSOD II) was not able to move much beyond the Final Document of UNSSOD I. UNSSOD III could not agree on any final statement at all.

6. Other

The UN has a Department for Disarmament Affairs (DDA), which helps carry out the recommendations contained in General Assembly resolutions. The DDA conducts studies, organizes conferences and distributes information about disarmament around the world.

In addition to the Special Sessions, the UN General Assembly occasionally holds special conferences on disarmament-related issues, such as the UN Conference on Disarmament and Development held in 1987. In addition, as a result of a UN Security Council decision, a UN Special Commission is now looking after the destruction of Iraq's missile, nuclear, chemical and biological weapons capabilities.

Problems with the UN in disarmament

Since almost all states in the world take part in most UN disarmament discussions, it is hard to find recommendations on which all — or even most — can agree. States often use the First Committee and the UNDC as places to talk "at" one another rather than "with" one another. Even the CD, with its smaller membership, has found it difficult to bring together states' differing opinions on the complicated issue of a chemical weapons ban.

The resolutions adopted by the General Assembly sometimes contradict one another. Resolutions that are adopted by consensus often contain language so general that it would be hard to turn them into treaties, which need to be clear and precise. Resolutions that are not adopted by consensus have less force. Moreover, the states voting against the resolution are often the ones who would have to put the recommendations into effect. It's important to remember that the UN does not exist independently of the states that make it up. If Member States are not prepared to take steps towards disarmament, the General Assembly cannot force them to.

Because of the largeness and slowness of the UN, states that want to negotiate a disarmament treaty often do so outside the UN. Over the last ten years, all major disarmament treaties have been negotiated outside the UN. These include the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty between the USA and the USSR, the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe between NATO and the former Warsaw Pact, and the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty between the USA and the USSR.

Value of the UN in disarmament

The UN provides a forum for states to exchange ideas about disarmament and to identify areas where they agree. For states that don't participate in disarmament talks between East and West, the UN may be the only place they can put forward their concerns and opinions on disarmament. UN studies and conferences can explore new approaches to