

NGOs and the NPT Review Process

The widely acknowledged contribution of NGOs to multilateral processes is no less important to disarmament and security concerns, even though NGOs point to evidence that some "governments continue to jealously guard their prerogatives when it comes to decision-making about weapons and weapons reduction."²⁹ Even so, NGOs have been heavily engaged, and "as the global security debate moves from being simply defined in traditional national security/arms control terms to concerns about 'human security', the types of NGOs and the nature of their involvement also broadens and deepens."³⁰

While the focus of this paper is the level and modalities of direct NGO access to the NPT Review Process, that is, access to debates and proceedings at the PrepCom and RevCon events themselves, the primary role and influence of NGOs in support of nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament are to be found outside these forums. Indeed, the primary rationale for increased NGO participation in the PrepComs and RevCons is their extensive participation in, nationally and internationally, and thus relevance to, nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament efforts. Nuclear disarmament NGOs make key contributions to building and nurturing public concern and thus political will, advancing global norms, enhancing transparency, monitoring compliance, framing public understanding, and providing expert analysis. It is because they are engaged collectively in the global nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament effort on all these levels, that states and NGOs themselves seek to enhance their participation in formal review conferences and negotiating forums.

The mode of that participation has gradually evolved, and has been increasingly welcomed, over the life of the Treaty. In February the Secretary-General encouraged the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters to explore ways to involve civil society in advancing disarmament issues. "Non-governmental organizations have long played a vital galvanizing role in this area, mobilizing public opinion and motivating political leaders to act with determination to promote disarmament," the Secretary-General said in remarks to his Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters, which is meeting at UN Headquarters in New York. "An alert and knowledgeable public can contribute greatly to convincing world leaders that a much better and safer world can be achieved by doing away with all weapons of mass destruction."³¹

Canada's statement to the 2002 NPT PrepCom, supported through interventions from other States, emphasized the importance of "partnerships with civil society" in pursuing non-proliferation, arms control, and disarmament objectives, and welcomed the participation and involvement of NGOs in the work of the Preparatory Committee. Canada specifically urged states to consider means "to enhance the participation of civil society in the preparatory process and at Review Conferences."³²

To date the NPT Review Process has not included NGOs at the same level of involvement as is present in several of the processes referred to above. Rule 43 of the Rules of Procedure of the NPT Review Conferences simply notes that the plenary meetings and meetings of the Main Committees "shall be held in public unless the body concerned decides otherwise." Rule 42 specifically notes that "meetings of other organs of the conference shall be held in private."³³ Nevertheless, as the Chair of the 2002 Preparatory Committee noted in his opening statement, NGO participation has been a "constant feature" of the preparatory sessions and the Review Conferences, including the now regular allocation of one meeting in each PrepCom and RevCon for NGO oral presentations. NGO access to the NPT process has thus developed into a general pattern (confirmed at the 2002 PrepCom):

- I. NGOs are allowed to attend those sessions that are not designated as closed;
- II. NGO seating is in the public gallery;
- III. One meeting per PrepCom session and in the RevCon is devoted to oral statements by NGOs;
- IV. The majority of the sessions are in cluster working groups and are closed to NGOs;
- V. NGOs are provided with a meeting room within the Secretariat building (to which rental charges are now attached);

²⁹ David Atwood, "NGOs and disarmament: views from the coal face," *Disarmament Forum* (UNIDIR, No. 1, 2002), p. 6.

³⁰ David Atwood, "NGOs and disarmament: views from the coal face," *Disarmament Forum* (UNIDIR, No. 1, 2002), p. 7.

³¹ Remarks to a meeting of the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters at UN Headquarters in New York, February 6, 2003 (<http://www.un.org/apps/sq/sqstats.asp?nid=248>).

³² Notes for Remarks by The Hon. Christopher Westdal, Ambassador for Disarmament, to the Preparatory Committee for the Conference of the Parties of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, New York, April 9, 2002.

³³ Note by the President of the Conference on Disarmament.