

Until recently, the role of the United Nations was, for the most part, limited to the inclusion of references in specific arms control agreements concerning the use of the United Nations to provide assistance in verification activities upon request, most commonly involving consultations. For example, Article V of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention of 1972 provides for consultation and cooperation to resolve ambiguities, which may be "undertaken through appropriate international procedures within the framework of the United Nations and in accordance with its Charter". Reference was also made to the use of the Security Council to resolve concerns regarding compliance (Article VI).

In 1985, however, the United Nations began a more fundamental consideration of the process of verification and its role in this field. At the fortieth session of the General Assembly, the first comprehensive resolution (40/152(o)) on verification was initiated by Canada. This resolution was adopted by consensus. Canada undertook this action as a result of a systematic examination of the subject of verification begun in the early 1980s. It was recognized by Canada that verification was and would remain a fundamental component of the arms control process concerning which there was little serious international study. Canada believed that an important first step in the establishment of an appropriate role for the United Nations was to develop a basic understanding of the verification process and the role of multilateral institutions in that process.

The two following sessions of the General Assembly adopted similar resolutions on verification by consensus. In 1987, pursuant to resolution 41/86(q), Canada chaired a working group at the United Nations Disarmament Commission (UNDC) on "Verification In All Its Aspects." In May of 1988, a UNDC working group, again under Canadian chairmanship, succeeded in concluding consideration of this subject with the adoption by consensus of a non-exhaustive list of sixteen principles that elaborate upon the principles respecting verification enunciated in the Final Document of the First Special Session on Disarmament.<sup>6</sup> The work of the UNDC in 1987 and in 1988 has served to deepen the international community's understanding of the complexities of verification and its appreciation of the difficulties involved in developing a United Nations role in this context. Moreover, the list of sixteen verification principles agreed at the 1988 session of the UNDC, constitutes a new consensus and a new foundation for further work by the United Nations in this field.