

INTRODUCTION

Recent dramatic changes in world affairs have not altered the fact that one hundred and sixty armed nations still nervously regard their neighbours as potential adversaries. Some are capable of incinerating the planet in a quarter of an hour. Many others can provoke unimaginable conflagration over days, months and years. A much more populated world, already burdened with millions of economic and environmental refugees, is on the brink of economic disruption and widespread starvation. One of the few sustained attempts to address these troubles has been the United Nations based efforts to link the dangers and increasing cost of armament with the obvious and growing need for food, clean water, health care and jobs in the poorest nations.

At the United Nations some nations have argued that the two central problems facing humanity, armament and underdevelopment, should be addressed together. Some claim that disarmament, especially disarmament by the large military powers, would facilitate economic and social development. Money freed by disarmament could be transferred to development needs. There has been support for the establishment of a United Nations fund that would be the depository for disarmament savings and the source for new development assistance. It is also argued that development progress would reduce international disparities, tensions and local instability and would thus facilitate disarmament.

Throughout the 1980s the United Nations studied this potential approach to solving the world's most serious problems. Some nations advocated this approach, demanding quick disarmament measures and the creation of a fund to transfer disarmament savings to the poorest nations. Other nations dismissed it as naive, unrealistic and dangerous.

This attempt to link disarmament to development as a remedy for the troubles of our changing world deserves attention for two reasons. First, the political failure of the international community to recognize such a link is an important conclusion for those seeking solutions to humanity's great problems to heed. Second, this political failure offers an important example of how the United Nations continues to be frustrated in its important tasks of preventing war and promoting global well-being.