

Although viewed by some as an agreement between nuclear and non-nuclear weapon states, only three of the states possessing these weapons--the United States, Britain and the Soviet Union--have actually signed the NPT. France and China--as well as suspected or "near" nuclear weapon states such as Israel, India, Pakistan, Brazil, Argentina and South Africa--have all yet to accede to the Treaty. So far, however, India is the only non-signatory NNWS known to have exploded a nuclear device. The explosion took place in 1974, and was described by the Indian Government as intended "for peaceful purposes only." On 3 October 1988, Saudi Arabia became the latest state to accede to the Treaty.

One obstacle to further accession to the NPT has been the long-held view among some states that it is discriminatory. Not only does it allow nuclear weapon states to maintain their arsenals while refusing the right of acquisition to others, but it requires the latter to open their facilities to the IAEA while the former are not required to do so. Nevertheless, as of June 1989, 141 states were party to the Treaty.

Three review conferences have thus far been held on the operation of the NPT. At the first review, in 1975, expressions of concern were voiced by the neutral and non-aligned nations regarding the failure of the NWS to halt the arms race. These states called for an end to underground nuclear testing, large reductions in nuclear arsenals, and a pledge by nuclear weapon states not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against their non-nuclear counterparts. Agreement by the NWS to make a greater effort to address these concerns was reflected in the Final Document.

The second review conference in 1980 was less successful than its predecessor. This was in large part due to the fact that since 1975, none of the demands of the neutral and non-aligned states had been met. Although some agreement was reached on safeguards for peaceful nuclear programmes, no consensus could be reached on bringing a halt to the expansion of existing nuclear arsenals ("vertical" proliferation). In fact, no final declaration, nor any reaffirmation of support for the Treaty, was issued from the review's proceedings.

The failure of the NWS to make substantive progress in the area of vertical proliferation resurfaced as the key issue at the most recent review in 1985. Indeed, in the five years separating the third review from the second, no major arms control measure of any kind had been achieved. A Final Declaration was, however, adopted by consensus. In it, the participants expressed the conviction that the NPT was essential for international peace and security, and reaffirmed their support for the Treaty and its objectives.

The Declaration also expressed the deep regret of all but some participants (i.e., the United States and Britain) over the failure to conclude a comprehensive test ban, and called on nuclear weapon states parties to resume trilateral negotiations, as well as to participate actively in the CD, to achieve it.

On 25 October 1988, informal meetings by parties to the NPT during the Forty-third Session of the UN General Assembly led to a decision to hold the fourth review conference in July and August 1990. The meetings also resulted in the establishment of a preparatory committee for the conference. The committee, of which Canada is a member, began preparations for the review from 1 to 5 May 1989 in New York. During the first meeting, it was decided that the Review would be held in Geneva from 20 August to 14 September 1990. Two additional preparatory committee meetings (11 to 18 September, 1989