

## I ASSESSMENT AND OUTLOOK

### ASSESSMENT

A frequently cited criterion for the success of a United Nations conference or special session is the adoption of a consensus report. Judged against this standard, the Third United Nations Special Session on Disarmament (UNSSOD III), held May 31 - June 25, 1988 in New York, clearly ended in failure. However the sole purpose of such meetings is not merely to reach consensus on concluding documents. With respect to other less tangible yardsticks, such as the generally positive atmosphere, our verdict need not be as harsh.

It was apparent during the year-long preparatory process and at the month-long Special Session itself that fundamental differences of approach to the multilateral arms control and disarmament (ACD) agenda persist within and among the major regional groups. The most significant areas of disagreement included: (a) the overall orientation - most Western states favoured a pragmatic step-by-step approach whereas certain of the Non-Aligned, and to a lesser extent the East Bloc states, preferred a more political, declaratory emphasis; (b) a general tendency among the Non-Aligned to place the onus for progress on the nuclear-weapon-states and the superpowers, in particular; and (c) different approaches to the role of the UN in the broad ACD process, with some countries seeking a broader UN role, and others placing more emphasis on negotiating efforts at the bilateral and regional levels.

These differences translated into significant disagreements on specific issues such as: whether the UNSSOD I Final Document remained valid and should be reaffirmed in all its aspects, or whether it should rather be seen as a valued historical point of reference subject to modification in the light of new realities; the importance that should be attached to nuclear as opposed to conventional disarmament; the nature of the relationship between disarmament, development and security; the need to bring weapons-related research and development and the qualitative development of weapons under more effective policy direction; the utility of the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones and zones of peace; support for the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT); the pace and manner of progress towards the realization of a comprehensive test ban treaty (CTBT); and consideration of the naval arms race and prevention of an arms race in outer space issues.