

Success at May Meeting of United Nations Disarmament Commission

The United Nations Disarmament Commission (UNDC) met in New York from May 2 to May 20, 1988. This year's session had extra significance in that it immediately preceded the Third Special Session on Disarmament of the United Nations General Assembly (UNSSOD III). There were, consequently, added expectations that the UNDC could complete consideration of several items and report the result of its work to UNSSOD III.

Under the effective chairmanship of Ambassador Davidson Hepburn of the Bahamas, the UNDC was able to get down to substantive business very quickly. Among its most notable accomplishments, the Commission agreed upon a set of "Guidelines for appropriate types of confidence-building measures and for the implementation of such measures on a global or regional level." This significant and detailed document sets out an agreed set of guidelines on principles, objectives, characteristics, implementation and development for confidence-building measures. Canada has strongly supported the UNDC's efforts to develop these guidelines, which first began with an initiative by the Federal Republic of Germany in 1982.

One of the most significant successes of UNDC during its 1988 Session was in the area of arms control verification. Canada's Ambassador for Disarmament, Douglas Roche, for a second year, chaired a working group on the subject which reached consensus on a set of 16 principles relating to verification. This comes as a culmination of several years' effort by Canada which began with the initiation of a General Assembly resolution in 1985. This resolution and those of the two subsequent years, also initiated by Canada, were adopted by consensus.

The overall objective of Canadian efforts on verification at the UNDC was to enhance international understanding of the verification issues, with a view to improving opportunities for negotiating meaningful and adequately verifiable arms control and disarmament (ACD)

agreements, particularly multilateral ones.

At UNDC 87, Canada, as chairman, submitted a detailed and comprehensive paper which outlined draft conclusions for the working group. Most delegations were complimentary of the quality of this submission text. Divergent views were reconciled through careful and patient negotiation, and a shorter report was adopted by consensus. This report incorporated an illustrative, non-exhaustive list of ten verification principles that elaborate upon or add to those found in the Final Document of the First Special Session on Disarmament in 1978.

The 1988 session of the UNDC built upon the success of the previous year's session, with the adoption of a report on May 18 that concluded the UNDC's consideration of verification. This report added six new verification principles to those agreed upon in 1987.

The 1988 report also summarizes the UNDC's discussions on techniques of verification and on the role of the United Nations in the field of verification. While there was no consensus for making firm recommendations regarding these latter two topics, the UNDC's deliberations can still be regarded as useful in that the exchange of views on these points resulted in a much better understanding of the issues involved.

The substance of the UNDC's report on verification is particularly noteworthy. As Ambassador Roche said in his concluding remarks at the UNDC: "The sixteen principles that have now been adopted by consensus, as outlined in Part 1 of the report, represent a new consensus by the international community with respect to this very important subject and, moreover, lay a new foundation for all future activities by the United Nations in this area."

The successful conclusion of the UNDC's consideration of verification underlines the appropriateness of Canada's evolutionary approach to verification. Canada's previous efforts in the General Assembly and other international forums, bilateral discussions with

various governments, production of practical yet innovative reports, and other activities in this field, all helped to prepare the foundation for the UNDC's success by sensitizing the international community to the importance of verification. Also crucial to the success of the Commission on this item was the spirit of co-operation and support manifested by the members of the verification working group both in 1987 and 1988. It is this spirit which underlays the new consensus of the international community on this subject.

While the UNDC has advanced consideration of the verification issue significantly, Canada still believes that important work needs to be done on this subject within the context of the United Nations. To this end, Canada and the Netherlands tabled a detailed paper at UNSSOD III which examined the role of the United Nations in verification. The paper concludes with a proposal that the Secretary-General, with the assistance of a group of qualified governmental experts, undertake a study on the role of the United Nations in verification. In the course of discussions between Canada and other countries at UNSSOD III, a mandate for this study was refined, which received widespread approval during the late hours of the Special Session. However, because of the inability to reach agreement on other points, the Special Session was unable to arrive at a concluding document.

Any role for the United Nations must develop in a step-by-step fashion based on what is realistically feasible in today's political and financial environment. In Canada's view, a Group of Experts study on the role of the United Nations in verification, based on the mandate worked out at UNSSOD III, would be the next logical step for advancing the consideration of verification within the United Nations and the role of the United Nations in this field. This mandate would ensure that the merits and implications of all proposals in this context are considered and assessed. Canada will continue to pursue this proposal at the United Nations. □