

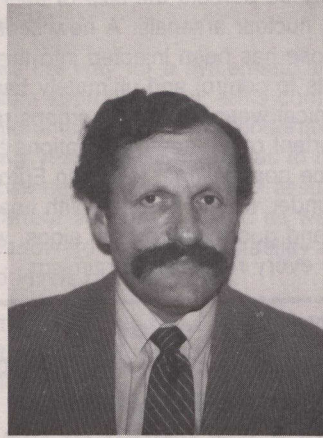
Crise de crédibilité

The Conference on Disarmament (CD) is the "single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum" of the international community. Constituted in its present form in 1978, it meets in Geneva and has a unique relationship with the United Nations. It is not a subsidiary body of the General Assembly and defines its own rules of procedure and develops its own agenda, taking into account the recommendations made by the General Assembly.

The following are excerpts from the statement by Mr. Fred Bild, Assistant Deputy Minister for Political and International Security Affairs, Department of External Affairs, before the Conference on Disarmament, June 20, 1989, Geneva.

"Mr. President. It is time we took stock of the multilateral arms control and disarmament process. It seems to me that we may be approaching a *crise de crédibilité* with our publics in the way disarmament issues are dealt with on an international level. No one doubts the dedication, patience and integrity of the people who study, discuss and negotiate these matters on behalf of their countries. But, in the best tradition of self-criticism, perhaps we should see whether, in the ceaseless round of discussions, meetings, deliberations and negotiations in the various multilateral forums dedicated to disarmament issues, we are not somehow engaged in a faster and faster dance rather than in the process of advancing the dialectic. Instead of attempting to achieve a higher level of unity by reconciling opposites and revealing the truths of the underlying idea, it may seem to the man in the street that the dance just swirls on, frenetically. I don't wish to overtax this metaphor, but it seems somehow an appropriate way of interpreting events of the last while.

Many of the distinguished representatives present here at the Conference on Disarmament will have shared my disappointment at the failure of last year's UNSSOD III to achieve agreement. At what point does the failure to reach



Mr. Fred Bild, Assistant Deputy Minister, Political and International Security Affairs, Department of External Affairs.

agreement at large, highly publicized meetings begin to call the effort itself into question? The paucity of results at most recent meetings of the United Nations Disarmament Commission, in the wake of the disappointing outcome of UNSSOD III, cannot help but feed the public's scepticism as to the value of these meetings.

Against this, we have witnessed the gratifying thaw in East-West relations. The superpower relationship seems well poised to reach further accommodation in creating a framework of mutual security. Recent developments in the conventional force reduction negotiations just underway in Vienna have shown dramatically what can be achieved among sovereign states when the spirit of compromise infuses and directs disparate political wills. The Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) talks will be no Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction (MBFR). Agreement was forged in a setting where all joined in a quest for a common position from which to address the largest security transition since the end of the Second World War. They are embarking on a venture that seeks to supplant the military confrontation in central Europe with defensive systems restructured into few units with regulated and reduced offensive capabilities.

Although these are early days, the commitment by the NATO countries, led by President Bush's suggestion for an accelerated timetable to get moving in

negotiations with Warsaw Treaty Organization (WPO) member states gives one hope that disarmament is not the preserve of only the utopian and the idealist. What we are seeing is the effort of the pragmatist to translate noble aspirations into reality. It is the pragmatist who sees the pay-off in disarmament, not just in its promised economic benefits but also in a heightened sense of security — mutual security. The relevance of these comments to the present meeting, Mr. President, is that we are watching in Vienna an unfolding of a multilateral arms control and disarmament process which promises to refute those who argue that only in bilateral arrangements can a country work out a satisfactory security relationship with a potential adversary.

We must also recognize, however, that the quest for disarmament should not be too far in advance of what relevant political conditions can sustain. Until those conditions are dealt with, until, that is, determination is shown by all parties involved to bring their mutual understanding and political accommodation to a level where practical steps toward arms control or actual disarmament can take place, our sights must be lowered somewhat to the level of confidence-building. It is still pertinent to recall the familiar observation that one must learn to walk before one can begin to run.

The achievement of the Stockholm Conference provided a salutary lesson in this regard. The accord reached in September 1986 on confidence- and security-building measures in Europe ushered in an era of greater transparency and openness between military blocs without excluding the neutral and non-aligned states of the region. In so doing, it set the stage for the Conventional Force Reductions we all hope will be the outcome of the CFE negotiations. If these actually manage to bring about the destruction of military equipment before international observers, as proposed, we shall finally have achieved multilateral disarmament without any lessening of security. There is another aspect to the legacy of Stockholm we must not forget: it successfully incorporated short-notice challenge inspection to verify compliance with the provisions of