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The Disarmament Bulletin

A review of Canada's arms control and disarmament activities

Number 14 - Fall 1990

NPT Review Conference: Much Progress, But No Final Document



The NPT Review Conference in plenary session.

Eighty-four of the 142 parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) met in Geneva from August 20 to September 14 to review the Treaty's operation.

The NPT, which is the centrepiece of global efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons beyond the five declared nuclear-weapon states (the United States, the

Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, France and China) provides for review conferences at five-year intervals, if so desired by the parties. This was the fourth review conference to be held since the NPT entered into force in 1970. Fifteen states attended the Conference as observers, including France and China, the two nuclear-weapon states not party to the NPT.

Although best known for its first two articles, designed to prevent the horizontal proliferation of nuclear weapons, the NPT is a multi-faceted treaty that also includes provisions on the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, nuclear trade and disarmament. All of these aspects were considered by the parties present in Geneva.

While the Conference achieved significant and positive results in most areas, it was regrettably unable to produce a final document. The sticking point was Article VI of the Treaty, which calls on parties to pursue negotiations in good faith aimed at ending the arms race and moving to nuclear and general disarmament. On this, the issue of a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty was the most controversial.

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