

The United Nations has stood by the goal, adopted in 1959, of general and complete disarmament under effective international control. A number of limited agreements for arms control have been achieved through U.N. initiatives – such as the Antarctic Treaty, the Partial Test Ban Treaty, the Outer Space Treaty, the Treaty of Tlatelolco, the Non-Proliferation Treaty. At the first United Nations Special Session on Disarmament in 1978 (UNSSOD I), the 149 participating nations adopted, by what has been called an “historic consensus,” a 129-paragraph Final Document containing a Program of Action which listed measures intended to be implemented “over the next few years.”

The Final Document held that the accumulation of weapons, particularly nuclear weapons “today constitutes much more of a threat than a protection for the future of mankind.” Genuine and lasting peace could only be created through the effective implementation of the security system provided for in the U.N. Charter. Priorities set out were: nuclear weapons; other weapons of mass destruction, including chemical weapons; conventional weapons; and reduction of armed forces. Nuclear weapons “pose the greatest danger to mankind and to the survival of civilization,” and the ultimate goal, therefore, “is the complete elimination of nuclear weapons.” The process of disarmament should ensure that the security of all states is guaranteed at progressively lower levels of all armaments, nuclear and conventional. It suggested a comprehensive, phased programme with agreed time frames, whenever possible.

But no progress has been made in achieving agreements since then. The fault lies not with the U.N. as such but with those governments that use confrontation rather than cooperation in the conduct of their relations.

U.N. First Committee

The First Committee of the U.N. General Assembly, which deals with political and security matters, has an agenda comprising the entire range of arms control and disarmament questions. The First Committee is a deliberative body and prepares recommendations and draft resolutions which are then submitted to the General Assembly for adoption on the basis of majority vote.

At the 39th General Assembly in 1984, the First Committee adopted 64 arms control and disarmament resolutions ranging from Radiological Weapons to the Reduction of Military Budgets.