

Disarmament Times

By Douglas Roche

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan hit the nail on the head when he said, after the 2005 Review Conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty ended in failure, there are times when multilateral forums merely reflect, rather than mend, deep rifts in the international community.

At the outset of the Conference, the Secretary-General painted a picture of a nuclear catastrophe in one of the great cities of the world in an effort to strike a note of urgency in calling for action. But the conference became paralyzed.

Fully 15 days of the 20-day meeting were consumed by procedural battles over how, if at all, to refer to the 1995 and 2000 commitments made by the nuclear weapons States for systematic progress on their “unequivocal undertaking” to total nuclear disarmament. In such a sour atmosphere, the limited discussion of substantive issues could not produce any agreement.

All the discussion over procedure, which at times sank into acrimony was actually a surrogate for the widening gulf between the nuclear haves and have-nots.

The United States wanted to keep the focus on the proliferation activities of Iran and North Korea. The Non-Aligned Movement wanted to

spotlight the failure of the nuclear weapons States to fulfil their disarmament commitments. The deadlock in the Conference, as Annan said, reflected world reality.

The reality is that the nuclear weapons States, despite their show of reductions, are cementing nuclear weapons into their military doctrines. They clearly want to stop proliferation, but this requires a tightening of the nuclear fuel cycle so that States cannot use the Treaty's benefits to obtain nuclear energy and then clandestinely built nuclear weapons.

This is the charge made against Iran and North Korea. Mohamed ElBaradei, Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency, has issued a plan to ensure the nuclear fuel cycle is not mis-used, but he is meeting resistance from the powerful and weak alike.

Non-nuclear States will have to give a little on their "inalienable" right to nuclear technologies to plug the loophole in the NPT – and some (e.g., Iran and Egypt) are unwilling to cooperate as long as the nuclear weapons States keep insisting that they themselves need nuclear weapons.

The crisis of the NPT is really a world crisis, and Annan tried to point this out. With the maintenance of nuclear weapons by the powerful and the potential spread of nuclear weapons to the less powerful, and also with the

added peril of nuclear terrorists on the move, the world is becoming intolerably dangerous.

The combination of lassitude, resentment, and now obstructionist tactics to prevent common agreements for action is threatening every person on the planet. No one is safe from the possibility of a nuclear attack or accident and its consequences to the world economy.

Political leaders, for the most part, are not yet seized of the issue. No world leader attended the NPT Conference and only Russian President Vladimir Putin, among their ranks, sent a personal message. Even most of the Foreign Ministers of the New Agenda Coalition, which carries the hopes of many for nuclear disarmament, stayed home. As for the NATO countries, the low level of representation guaranteed inaction absent high-level political direction.

So, in his statement at the end, Annan appealed to the 170 heads of State and government scheduled to convene in September in New York at a Summit marking the 60th anniversary of the U.N. to break the deadlock in nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. It will certainly take a huge political push to overcome the current U.S. intransigence to multilateral agreements on nuclear disarmament.

The U.S. will step up its counter-proliferation activities in getting countries to implement the Proliferation Security Initiative and Security Council Resolution 1540 to crack down on would-be proliferators. But these instruments do almost nothing for nuclear disarmament. Revitalization of the NPT requires balanced implementation of the interlocking nature of disarmament and non-proliferation steps.

The time has come for like-minded States to start a fresh approach to examine the legal, political and technical requirements leading to a nuclear weapons-free world. This was called for in a paper presented to the Conference by Malaysia and Costa Rica (NPT/CONF.2005/WP.41), which reads like a breath of fresh air. A concentrated effort by States that include countries from non-nuclear NATO, the NAM and the New Agenda Coalition would be an important contribution to implementing the controversial Article VI of the NPT.

Many in civil society, led in this instance by Mayors for Peace, are calling for negotiations to begin on a Nuclear Weapons Convention. The frustration of the failed NPT Conference will accelerate this call.

The people of the world deserve to be freed from the spectre of nuclear apocalypse. The moral and legal call for the abolition of nuclear weapons needs to be raised. If the wounded NPT is to be saved as the only

legal instrument we now have pointing the way to the elimination of nuclear weapons, like-minded countries must act.

Former Senator Douglas Roche of Canada is Chairman of the Middle Powers Initiative. His political analysis of the 2005 NPT Review Conference, "Deadly Deadlock," is available at www.middlepowers.org/2005NPTpoliticalanalysis.pdf