AFTER four weeks of intense negotiations and at times heated debate, agreement was reached on 28 May on moving ahead on the three pillars of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) – nuclear disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation and the peaceful use of nuclear energy. The agreement effectively reversed years of deteriorating international confidence in the Treaty, and offered concrete opportunities for progress in international disarmament efforts.

The outcome of the 2010 Review Conference, held at UN Headquarters on 3-28 May, was achieved following a painstaking process of negotiations that lasted until the very last day of the meeting. As with previous NPT reviews, the 2010 meeting was characterized by divergent, sometimes seemingly irreconcilable, positions among States parties on a range of complex and politically sensitive issues.

Underlying the variety of viewpoints is the strong anxiety among nuclear-weapon States over the dangers of further proliferation, on the one hand, and frustration among non-nuclear-weapon States over the absence of meaningful progress towards nuclear disarmament and legally-binding security guarantees, on the other. After 15 years without discernible progress, it was also clear that action on the implementation of the 1995 resolution on the Middle East would be pivotal to the success of the Conference.

As the conclusion of the Conference approached a deadlock on a number of issues, pressure grew from the Governments themselves, determined to achieve a success, and from various civil society groups and organizations whose voices came through louder and clearer than at previous NPT review conferences.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who closely followed the negotiations, urged delegations in a 24 May press conference “to be pragmatic, to abandon rhetoric, and to look beyond narrow national interest.... There is too much at stake for the conference to end in failure.”

In the end, States parties found enough common ground to unanimously adopt a final document which, though imperfect, strengthens the NPT as the cornerstone of the global nuclear non-proliferation regime and the essential foundation for nuclear disarmament.

In presenting the draft final document for adoption, the President of the Conference, Ambassador Libran Cabactulan of the Philippines, acknowledged that while “it may not fully satisfy many,” it was the “very best that can be offered given the complexities of the issues” and the positions of States parties.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE OUTCOME

The Conference reaffirmed the NPT objective of achieving a world without nuclear weapons and set a number of realistic benchmarks over the next five years, while endorsing the principles of irreversibility, verifiability and transparency in relation to the implementation of Treaty obligations. Individually and collectively, these constitute an incremental step beyond the commitments agreed to in the 2000 Review Conference.

Most notably, the action plan commits nuclear-weapon States to accelerate progress on steps already agreed in 2000 for rapid reductions of nuclear arsenals. These include addressing all types of nuclear weapons regardless of their location, diminishing the role of nuclear weapons in security doctrines, discussing policies to prevent their use, reducing the operational status of nuclear weapons systems and reducing the risk of accidental use. The nuclear-weapon States are to report on progress in 2014 to the Preparatory Committee for the next NPT review.

There was another notable agreement – after 15 years virtually without progress – on concrete measures leading up to
a full implementation of the 1995 resolution on the Middle East. The resolution, among other things, called for practical steps toward the establishment of an effectively verifiable zone in the Middle East that is free of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery.

The Review Conference endorsed the convening by the UN Secretary-General, with the support of the three co-sponsors of the 1995 resolution (Russian Federation, United Kingdom and United States), of a 2012 conference on establishing such a zone. The Secretary-General, in consultation with the co-sponsors and States of the region, must also designate a host government for the conference and a facilitator with responsibility for engaging in consultations and making preparations for the conference.

With regard to the universal adherence to the NPT, the President’s Review portion of the outcome document called upon “all States not parties to the Treaty, India, Israel and Pakistan,” to accede to it “without further delay and without any conditions,” and to bring into force the required comprehensive safeguards agreements and Additional Protocols.

Summing up the outcome – and borrowing from the metaphor used by the Secretary-General in his article, “A New Ground Zero” – it could be said that the foundation has been cemented on the construction site for a nuclear-weapon-free world.

Clearly, major challenges remain. Despite progress reached at the Review Conference, differences in approaches remain between nuclear-weapon “haves” and “have-nots” with regard to the pace of the nuclear disarmament process and non-proliferation issues. There are other sticking points requiring further international attention and agreement, including security guarantees for non-nuclear-weapon States, fissile material production, NPT compliance and its universality, to name just a few. The nuclear programmes in the Islamic Republic of Iran and in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, as well as the threat of nuclear terrorism, also are unresolved issues of major concern to the international community.

**Nuclear Disarmament: A Commitment of the Secretary-General**

The Secretary-General’s sustained engagement in the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation agenda has contributed substantially to the overall momentum that has been established on nuclear disarmament.

Early in his term, in October 2008, the Secretary-General presented a five-point proposal on achieving a nuclear-weapon-free world (see box) which was noted in the Final Document of the 2010 Review Conference. He further elaborated on that proposal in December 2009, presenting an action plan founded on the principle that nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation are mutually reinforcing, inseparable and should be pursued in tandem.

In support of the Secretary-General’s initiatives, in June 2009, the UN Department of Public Information launched a multi-platform campaign “WMD-We Must Disarm,” using a combination of digital and traditional outreach methods. This culminated on the International Day of Peace on 21 September, during the same week in which, at the initiative of US President Barack Obama, the Security Council held a historic summit on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. At the same time, a successful Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Conference was also held at UN Headquarters.

Elsewhere, a number of encouraging international developments have taken place. These include, immediately prior to the May Review Conference, the signing by the Russian Federation and the United States of the Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms and the convening by the United States of a nuclear security summit in Washington, D.C., in April.

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**Secretary-General’s Five-Point Proposal for a Nuclear-Weapon-Free World (summary)**

1. **Nuclear Disarmament**
   All NPT parties, in particular the nuclear-weapon States, to fulfill their obligation to negotiate on effective measures for nuclear disarmament. This could entail a framework of separate, mutually reinforcing instruments or a nuclear-weapons convention backed by a robust verification. More investment in verification research and development is needed.

2. **Security Issues**
   Security Council permanent members should commence discussions on nuclear disarmament security issues. They could unambiguously assure non-nuclear-weapon States that they will not be subject to the use, or threat of use, of nuclear weapons. The Council could also convene a nuclear disarmament summit. Non-NPT states to freeze their own nuclear-weapon capabilities and make their own disarmament commitments.

3. **Rule of Law**
   New efforts are needed to bring the CTBT into force, and for the Conference on Disarmament to begin negotiations on a fissile material treaty immediately, without preconditions. The nuclear-weapon States should be encouraged to ratify all the protocols to the nuclear-weapon-free zone treaties and efforts to establish such a zone in the Middle East should be strongly supported. All NPT parties should conclude their safeguards agreements with the IAEA and adopt the strengthened safeguards under the Additional Protocol.

4. **Accountability and Transparency**
   Nuclear-weapon states to make public descriptions of what they are doing to pursue these goals and send material to the UN Secretariat for wider dissemination.

5. **Complementary Measures**
   These include elimination of other types of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs); new efforts against WMD terrorism; limits on the production and trade in conventional arms; and new weapons bans, including on missiles and space weapons. The General Assembly could also take up the Blix Commission recommendation for a World Summit on disarmament, non-proliferation and terrorist use of WMDs.