

## Overview of the 2010 Disarmament Commission

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The 2010 Disarmament Commission is in the second year of its three year cycle. The Commission adopted three agenda items last year: recommendations for achieving the objective of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation; elements of a draft declaration for the 2010s as the fourth disarmament decade; and practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional weapons.

Last year's Disarmament Commission began work on the first two issues which has continued into this year. Entering into the third and final week, the Commission was still focusing on the first two issues. The Commission is split into two working groups, with Working Group 1 focusing on recommendations for achieving the objective of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, and Working Group 2 focused on the elements of a draft declaration for the 2010s as the fourth disarmament decade. As for the general debate and working groups, representatives of civil society and external experts are not still allowed to attend the Commission. This point was contended in 2008 and was brought up again by the Swiss delegation who called upon the Commission to "open up to ideas from the outside" in its opening statement.

Throughout the general debates in the Disarmament Commission, it did not seem likely that any substantial resolutions or recommendations would be adopted. After two and a half weeks of deliberations, the two working groups did however manage to adopt two working papers; one on the issues of the draft declaration for the 2010s and another on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. In spite of what has been repeatedly called a positive international environment for progress on disarmament issues, the lack of substance of the working group's documents was disappointing. Nuclear weapon states seemed willing but not able to commit to any major shifts due to what the Pakistani Ambassador referred to as the "genuine security concerns" of states that are "deeply rooted in historical legacy and geo-political factors." Yet certain nuclear weapon states seemed more willing to engage in constructive dialogue, stating the need for timelines and actual frameworks, as opposed to "open ended and unpredictable paths." The United States, however, opposed the establishment of such a framework, stating it had a "strong dislike of specified time language," although it did reiterate its desire to seek a world free of nuclear weapons.

The US-Russia New START treaty, which was signed on 8 April in Prague, seemed to overshadow the Disarmament Commission. Many states were congratulatory, calling the new treaty "a very strong, positive signal." Both the Russian Federation saw it "as major step forward and breakthrough in thinking," and saw it moving toward a more "irreversible, verifiable, and transparent" nuclear security regime. The US delegation only gave a general overview of the new treaty. Stating that it "would require a 30% reduction in the US and Russian Nuclear arsenals," and it would be strictly enforced and transparent.

Yet some delegations seemed skeptical of the new developments in the US commitment to nuclear arms reduction. The US delegation faced several prodding questions from certain states, who wanted to know the specifics of the new treaty. The Pakistani ambassador was particularly poignant, asking if the reduction was going to be an actual elimination of nuclear weapons or

simply a shelving of a portion of the existing arsenal, and thus not really be a reduction at all. The Russian Federation was not directly questioned and remained silent throughout the debate. The Iranian delegation was not as laudatory over the recent developments however, pointing out that states that were reducing their nuclear arsenals, even significantly, were still maintaining capabilities that were threatening to some member states. The US 2010 Nuclear Posture Review also was also of major note during the Disarmament Commission and elicited some criticism from certain member states, particularly those not parties to the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty.

The news of the New START treaty led into the discussion of the Nuclear Weapons Free Zones (NWFZ) and their role as intermediate steps in the elimination of nuclear weapons. Establishing an NWFZ treaty in the Middle East is “essential to the peace and security of the region,” as pointed out by the Moroccan delegation. The Moroccan delegation further stated that an NWFZ for the Middle East “was inextricably linked to promoting the universalization and bolstering of the Nuclear non-proliferation treaty.”

The formulation of the final document of the commission left many questions unanswered and an unclear picture as to how successful the commission would be in the following year, the final of this cycle. The Russian Federation stated that it “hopes that this document would serve as a basis for the next year of the commission.” The Brazilian delegation followed this line of thought, hoping that something would come out of next year’s commission. The recent Washington Nuclear Security Summit and the New START treaty may be signs that a new energy and commitment to establishing a new more robust nuclear security regime was at hand. The Belgian delegation referred to the Commission as “a great school,” allowing for an understanding of the difficulties and complexities of these very difficult negotiations. Recognizing the failure of the Commission to fulfill its mandate, the Cuban delegation remained positive that next years meeting would produce meaningful results. The hopes for “equal security for all” that were echoed by many delegations throughout the Commission seemed beyond the reach of the Commission this year, but there was hope that from this year’s Commission the stage was set for a more “substantive session next year.”