

EDITOR'S NOTE

Although NGOs have a long history in the peace and disarmament movements—international ‘peace societies’ have been active since the nineteenth century—in the past few years NGOs and the wider civil society movement have ‘stepped into the spotlight’ in international fora. The fact that three disarmament-related NGOs have received Nobel Peace Prizes in recent years testifies to their influence and relevance today.

Many people equate NGOs with lobbying, applying pressure to reluctant governments, and trying to mobilize public opinion. Yet numerous NGOs have moved far beyond simple advocacy to being experts on specific aspects of disarmament and security issues. NGOs produce and disseminate original research, are active in policy design, and carry out difficult work ‘on the ground’.

As NGOs make essential contributions to disarmament and security debates, negotiations, policy development and implementation, why do we hear grumbling? Governments complaining that NGOs have no accountability and foul up delicate negotiations with their unreasonable demands and proposals; international organizations scrambling to balance the requirements of their state-centred nature with the recognition that governments are not necessarily the best representatives for some groups or issues; NGOs battling not just to be taken seriously as partners, but even to have a place at the table. Even NGOs squabbling among themselves.

A combination of recent developments—from the civil society fuelled push for a global mine ban convention, to the growing, diverse community concerned about small arms, to the words of the UN Secretary-General welcoming the participation of civil society as partners rather than spectators—all beg closer examination. What are the special assets that NGOs can contribute? How open is the field of disarmament and arms control to NGOs? Is NGO participation valued? Are there areas where increased cooperation would be useful? What lessons can be learned from recent NGO/civil society partnerships? Are NGOs being under-utilized?

With this issue of *Disarmament Forum*, we have only scratched the surface of this topic. We had hoped to include other voices in this issue—the voice of NGO funders, NGOs from developing countries, governments supportive of NGO work, etc. UNIDIR has a long tradition of working in partnership with NGOs and we look forward to publishing future articles on NGO contributions to disarmament and arms control.

The next issue of *Disarmament Forum* will focus on human security in Latin America. We will be examining several aspects of and contributing factors to human security, including small arms, civil–military relations and a case study on Colombia.

The New Year brings new faces to the Institute. First, we are pleased to welcome Nicolas Gerard as UNIDIR’s Programme Manager and Conference Organizer. Mr Gerard has a background in

international relations and a strong interest in peace and security issues. Secondly, UNIDIR's Visiting Fellows for 2002 have arrived. They will be focusing their work on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Fellows are Adel Atieh (Palestine), Gasser El Shahed (Egypt), Gilad Ben Nun (Israel) and Rana Hassan Taha (Jordan). Undoubtedly, these five new colleagues will enrich the work of the Institute and that of the wider community concerned with arms control and disarmament.

We regret to inform our readers that Julie Dahlitz, expert in arms control and disarmament law and a former UNIDIR colleague, passed away in December 2001. Dr Dahlitz recently edited a three-volume series published by the United Nations: *The International Law of Arms Control and Disarmament, Avoidance and Settlement of Arms Control Disputes, and Peaceful Resolution of Major International Disputes*.

We enter a new year with continuing violence in the Middle East, the war in Afghanistan, ongoing conflicts in Africa, economic and social structures crumbling across Latin and Central America, escalating tensions between two nuclear states in Asia, an investigation of biological weapons use in the United States—and the list continues. At the same time we are seeing a withdrawal from cooperative engagement on arms control, disarmament and security issues. UNIDIR firmly believes in multilateral endeavours and joint action to address the complex and knotted conflicts facing us today. We invite you to work in partnership with us to make this year more peaceful than the last.

Kerstin Vignard