

SPECIAL COMMENT

Last November, in General Assembly resolution 55/33 E, the United Nations General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to prepare, with the assistance of a group of governmental experts, a study on disarmament and non-proliferation education. In so doing, the General Assembly stressed both 'the urgency of promoting concerted international efforts at disarmament and non-proliferation' and 'the need, more than a decade after the end of the cold war and at the start of the twenty-first century, to combat the negative effects of cultures of violence and complacency in the face of the current dangers in this field through long-term programmes of education and training'.

This is not the first time the United Nations system has raised the issue of disarmament and non-proliferation education.

In 1978, the Final Document of the Tenth Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly, the first devoted to disarmament (known as SSOD I), called on governments and international organizations to develop programmes on peace and disarmament education at all levels. Two years later, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) convened the World Congress on Disarmament Education, and its conclusions were later endorsed by meetings of education ministers from different regions.

The United Nations World Disarmament Campaign was launched during the Second Special Session on Disarmament (SSOD II) in 1982. The Campaign's goals were to inform, educate and generate understanding and support for the UN's objectives in arms control and disarmament. The Campaign lasted until 1992, when through resolution 47/53 D it was transformed into the Disarmament Information Programme.

The United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 44/123 entitled 'Education for Disarmament' in 1989, which invited Member States and international governmental and non-governmental organizations to inform the Secretary-General of their efforts to develop programmes on peace and disarmament education at all levels. In 1991 and 1993, the General Assembly adopted resolutions 46/27 and 48/64, entitled 'Education and Information for Disarmament', which reiterated the importance of education, advisory and training programmes, and the objectives of the World Disarmament Campaign, as well as encouraged a 'redoubling of efforts' by governments and NGOs.

UNESCO and some NGOs continued their efforts and, in 1998, the World Conference on Higher Education addressed the issue of disarmament education as one of the central items of its agenda.

Despite these attempts to focus the international community's attention on disarmament and non-proliferation education for over twenty years, there have been few signs of true progress. We live in a very different world than that of 1978, and new educational initiatives may be warranted.

The first meeting of the Group of Governmental Experts established by resolution 55/33 E was held in New York in April; the second meeting is to take place in August. The ten-member Expert Group will submit its report to the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session next year.

The fact that this *Disarmament Forum* is focused on issues related to education for disarmament, non-proliferation and peace raises hopes that the international community will now give this subject the attention it merits. We look forward to the contributions from governments, the United Nations system, university educators, disarmament and peace-related institutes and NGOs.

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and Member of the Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters