

EDITOR'S NOTE

The stalemate in the Middle East Peace Process has taken a drastic turn for the worse in the past months. With violence exploding, hopes for positive steps towards a Palestinian-Israeli accord in the near future are all but extinguished. How will this deteriorating situation effect the rest of the Middle East? What are the near to mid-term prospects for the region? What's happening with ACRS and what, if anything, are its possibilities? Topics such as the international community's wavering equivocations on how to deal with Iraq, recent elections throughout the region and their implications, and the indisputable strategic importance of the Middle East demand a new examination through a regional security and disarmament lens. This issue of *Disarmament Forum* will offer a deeper exploration of how and why the Middle East constitutes such an important challenge to arms control and disarmament.

At the beginning of a new century, we are facing crises on several disarmament and arms control fronts. Weapons (from small arms to nuclear warheads) seem to be proliferating at increasing rates around the globe. Some would go so far as to claim that the norm of non-proliferation and our control regimes are crumbling. In response to this state of affairs, there has been a renewed interest in education for disarmament and non-proliferation. In November the General Assembly requested that the Secretary-General prepare a two-year study addressing this issue. A ten-person expert group will start their work on this study in April.

UNIDIR feels that the issue of education will be a crucial one in the coming years and for that reason we are dedicating the next issue of *Disarmament Forum* to an exploration of previous initiatives and potential directions. This issue of *Disarmament Forum* will hopefully be only the first of several activities to be undertaken by the Institute in this area. This issue will look both curriculum-based programmes and out-of-school initiatives, as well as try to propose potential avenues for progress. Additionally we will be trying to identify how UNIDIR, as a UN research institute, could best serve as an interface between other international organizations and the research community on this topic.

We are pleased to announce that *Disarmament Forum*, due to the requests of our readers, now features a 'letters to the editor' section. As evident in this issue's contribution, reactions to articles in earlier editions are welcome. Of course, we reserve the right to edit letters for length and clarity. We look forward to hearing from you — your letters contribute to our journal's development into an increasingly open "forum".

Work on the UNIDIR/VERTIC Verification Handbook has already begun with the appointment of researcher Jane Boulden. Dr Boulden, currently a visiting scholar at Oxford University, will be examining regional and global verification regimes, with the aim of supporting the Middle East Peace Process. Please see the activities section for updates on this and other UNIDIR projects.

Due to an error during the layout process, Derek Brown's name was left off the credits for issue 1 2001 of *Disarmament Forum* on National Missile Defence. Derek, a junior at Davidson College in North Carolina, spent several months at UNIDIR undertaking research on issues related to the Middle East, missile defence and sanctions. Our apologies to Derek for this oversight.

Kerstin Vignard