

## EDITOR'S NOTE

While missile defences have a long and controversial history, the attention they have attracted over the last few years is not about to abate. Can missile defences actually work as advertised? Are such active defences an appropriate response to real or purported missile threats? What are their implications for the perennial “cornerstone” (or is it “sacred cow”) of deterrence? Although these and similar questions have been raised in previous instalments of the missile defence debate (from the genesis of the ABM Treaty to GPALS via SDI), they now present themselves in a very different and complex international security environment and need revisiting.

As we go to press, the outcome of the United States presidential election is still unknown. Since President Clinton pushed the decision on NMD deployment to his successor, the incoming president will be making a decision with long-term and serious ramifications for arms control and disarmament. UNIDIR’s natural point of interest, and the underlying common theme to the papers in this issue of *Disarmament Forum*, is the impact of missile defence plans, statements and deployments on prospects for arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament.

Our next issue of *Disarmament Forum* will focus on Middle Eastern security. The ongoing stalemate in the Middle East Peace Process has taken a drastic turn for the worse in the past months. With violence exploding on the West Bank and Gaza, hopes for positive steps towards a Palestinian-Israeli accord in the near future are all but extinguished.

What are the near to mid-term prospects for the region? What is happening with ACRS and what, if anything, are its chances? Topics such as the international community’s wavering equivocations on its Iraq policy, recent political changes, and the indisputable strategic importance of the region demand a new examination through a regional security and disarmament lens. The Middle East (broadly defined) remains one of the world’s most heavily armed regions. 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.

UNIDIR turns twenty! To kick off the year-long celebration, UNIDIR held a discussion meeting “Disarmament as Humanitarian Action” in conjunction with the Department for Disarmament Affairs. This event was held at UN Headquarters in New York during the First Committee Meetings. The event was a standing-room only success, with policy makers, diplomats, civil society organizations and inter-governmental bodies attending. This was the first event of a year-long series of UNIDIR anniversary events.

On 20 October, France supported a resolution (A/C.1/55/L.3/Rev.1) with seventy co-sponsors on the occasion of our anniversary. The resolution recognizes the importance and quality of the Institute’s work, encourages Member States to consider making financial contributions to UNIDIR

and recommends that the Secretary-General seeks ways to increase the funding of the Institute. We welcome this resolution and would like to extend our gratitude to all those who supported it.

UNIDIR's Visiting Fellows from South Asia arrived in Geneva the first week of November. They are Shiva Hari Dahal (Nepal, specialist in human rights), Haris Gazdar (Pakistan, political economy), Soosaipillai Keethaponcalan (Sri Lanka, ethnic relations and conflict resolution) and G. Padmaja (India, military and state security). The four fellows will be working together until April on a co-operative research project focusing on regional security and jointly producing a monograph. We are certain that this new wealth of regional knowledge at the Institute will enrich all of our activities.

On 30 November 2000, UNIDIR hosted a private discussion meeting entitled "Breaking the CD Deadlock". For over four years the CD has not been able to agree on a programme of work. Some critics go so far to claim that the deadlock at the CD is discrediting multilateral arms control and disarmament endeavours. Policy makers are beginning to wonder if the CD is worth investing in, as evident in the fact that some countries have reduced their delegation numbers and level of representation to the CD. In response to this worrying situation, the Institute held the first in a series of meetings designed to explore the underlying problems of the CD. The meeting, attended by over 100 experts, participants and observers of the CD generated a dynamic and thought-provoking debate with several suggestions of how to move the CD forward.

We are proud to present three new UNIDIR publications: *Tactical Nuclear Weapons: Options for Control*; *Tactical Nuclear Weapons: A Perspective from Ukraine*; and *Bound to Cooperate: Conflict, Peace and People in Sierra Leone*. See the publications section for further details.

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