

INTRODUCTION

Multilateral disarmament and arms control negotiations are a family of processes that have achieved scant success in recent years, despite pressing political imperatives.

Examples include thwarted efforts to strengthen the Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons Convention through legally binding measures to increase confidence in compliance, and the inability of the Conference on Disarmament to agree on a programme of work so as to begin negotiations on fissile materials (the next agreed multilateral step in the process of nuclear disarmament). The Conference, in particular, has been deadlocked since 1997 because its rules of procedure and working methods do not enable differences over priorities for negotiations to be resolved in the context of its work programme. Nor, as of writing, have efforts to move the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) to negotiate measures to alleviate the humanitarian effects of anti-vehicle mines (euphemistically described in that setting as mines other than anti-personnel mines) or to regulate weapons systems such as cluster munitions borne fruit.

At the same time, there have been some successes. These include the 1997 Antipersonnel Mine Ban Convention prohibiting anti-personnel mines and agreement at the end of 2003 on a protocol on explosive remnants of war in the CCW context.

Key to both successes have been humanitarian perspectives—from international organizations, field-based practitioners and transnational civil society—brought to bear on the negotiation dynamics in these processes. In particular, the implementation of the Mine Ban Convention has proved itself amenable to new—though less than revolutionary—methods of working that make porous the previously rigid partitions between “hard” security issues and humanitarianism.

Both the Mine Ban Convention and the CCW protocol negotiations on explosive remnants of war were, in practice, unique processes unlikely to be duplicated. But they are clear indications that more innovative

approaches in the practice of multilateral disarmament and arms control negotiation in general would be timely. In other words, a fresh look is needed if disarmament and arms control are to be effective, or considered relevant, to real world problems of this century deriving from the possession, use or threat of use of weapons. These problems range from the proliferation of small arms to potentially dangerous new “dual-use” technologies in the fields of the life sciences and nanotechnology, to spiralling proliferation of nuclear weapons. It is clearly not an easy challenge.

Against this backdrop the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) and the United Nations Department for Disarmament Affairs (DDA) hosted a meeting to mark UNIDIR’s first 20 years of existence in October 2000 entitled “Disarmament as Humanitarian Action”. The meeting’s theme reflected the view asserted by various actors within the disarmament/arms control spheres on the need for “human security” to be a greater driving force in multilateral efforts to disarm.

A follow-up conference co-organized with DDA and the Geneva Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue in 2002 was entitled “Disarmament, Health and Humanitarian Action: Putting People First”. It highlighted the need to consider disarmament from a human security perspective because of the potentially devastating effects of the misuse of weapons on people, and because a people-first approach offers creative and practical ways to move the disarmament agenda forward.

In 2000 I wrote that the hope of UNIDIR, by helping to bring focus to human-centred approaches before the disarmament community:

... is to rekindle the passion required to bring about a safer and more secure world for humanity. We think that part of that process would be helped by reminding technical disarmament experts of the dire need for arms limitation and disarmament and by bringing the issue of disarmament back into the world of humanitarian action where it belongs.

However, these types of appeals or reminders are clearly insufficient on their own to regain multilateral momentum to disarm. Moreover, there is no escaping the realities that lie at the heart of contemporary difficulties in various arms control contexts. But it is also apparent that multilateral

diplomats would like to avail themselves of better tools than they deploy currently to tackle the increasingly complex and (in some cases) seemingly intractable challenges they face.

In response, UNIDIR recently initiated a project with generous assistance from the Government of Norway aimed at reframing multilateral disarmament in humanitarian terms. This project is entitled “Disarmament as Humanitarian Action: Making Multilateral Negotiations Work”. Based on the recognition that a greater human security focus is relevant to disarmament and arms control processes, the project is concerned with developing practical proposals on how this broad concept can be applied in functional terms to help negotiators.

This volume stems from a meeting held on 3 November 2004. The meeting introduced the Disarmament as Humanitarian Action project to a range of experts from the disarmament and humanitarian environment. That meeting outlined basic concepts behind the project. And it generated examples of alternative perspective and possible approach in order to prompt suggestions and feedback. This is especially important because the project tries to adopt practitioners’ perspectives in understanding these issues.

The meeting followed Chatham House rules in order to encourage frank and open discussion. However, this volume contains papers by each of the four speakers based on their presentations, as well as a condensed summary of the meeting’s subsequent discussions.

I offer a few words now about each of the volume’s contributors. John Borrie, leader of the Disarmament as Humanitarian Action project, recently returned to UNIDIR after a year-and-a-half stint with the Mines-Arms Unit of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Prior to that he was a Research Fellow at UNIDIR between September 2002 and April 2003. During that period he researched and wrote *A Global Survey of Explosive Remnants of War*, which was published by Landmine Action (UK), and which was fed into the CCW negotiations on a protocol on explosive remnants of war in June 2003. Previously John was Deputy Head of Mission for Disarmament in Geneva with the New Zealand government, and was involved with most facets of disarmament and arms control in his role there. In this volume he has written about Rethinking Multilateral Negotiations: Disarmament as Humanitarian Action.

Dr Robin Coupland is adviser on armed violence and the effects of weapons for ICRC. He became a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons and joined the ICRC in 1987, working as a field surgeon in many countries, and holds a graduate diploma in international law from the University of Melbourne in Australia. Robin has published medical textbooks about care for wounded people and many articles relating to the surgical management of war wounds, the effects of weapons and armed violence.

As part of his current position Robin has focused on the effects of conventional and anti-personnel weapons and has developed a health-oriented approach to a variety of issues relating to the design and use of weapons. He has paid particular attention to the effects of anti-personnel mines and fragment injuries and the disruption of bullets using the Red Cross wound classification.

In promoting the concept of armed violence as a health issue, Robin's work pertains to a number of international legal issues and in particular the responsibility of governments to review new weapons and weapons' systems. He has developed an analytical framework of armed violence as a tool for reporting and communication. He has drawn on these themes in his article on modelling armed violence: a tool for humanitarian dialogue in disarmament and arms control.

Dr Patrick McCarthy is Coordinator of the Geneva Forum, a joint initiative of the Quaker United Nations Office in Geneva, UNIDIR and the Programme for Strategic and International Security Studies of the Graduate Institute of International Studies. Geneva Forum seeks to advance disarmament and arms control processes in a number of areas. Before joining the Geneva Forum in 2000 he worked for the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in Kosovo in the areas of human rights, democratization and election preparation and was the Conflict Prevention Coordinator of the 1999 "Hague Appeal for Peace". Patrick has a PhD in political and social sciences from the European University Institute in Florence, Italy. He has taken advantage of his unique vantage point at the intersection of arms control and humanitarian issues to write about deconstructing disarmament: the challenge of making the disarmament machinery responsive to the humanitarian imperative.

Vanessa Martin Randin is a researcher on the Disarmament as Humanitarian Action team. Prior to joining UNIDIR in 2003 Vanessa was a

Rotary Fellow at Lancaster University in the United Kingdom, where she completed her MA in international relations and strategic studies. She also holds a degree from the University of Western Ontario in Canada. Together with John Borrie, she presents findings from a research study as part of the Disarmament as Humanitarian Action Project entitled “A comparison between arms control and other multilateral negotiation processes”.

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