

Key States Reaffirm Ridding the World of Nuclear Weapons

THE HAGUE – A strong commitment to ridding the world of nuclear weapons was made by high-level representatives of 21 states at special forum at The Hague, March 2-3.

Convened by the Middle Powers Initiative, the Article VI Forum was addressed by two former prime ministers – Ruud Lubbers of the Netherlands and Kim Campbell of Canada - and former UN Under Secretary General for Disarmament Affairs, Ambassador Nobuyasu Abe, and Marian Hobbs, the former Disarmament Minister of New Zealand.

The Forum is a program of the Middle Powers Initiative, a consortium of eight non-government organizations dedicated to the elimination of nuclear weapons. The two-day meeting, co-hosted by the Netherlands Institute of International Relations “Clingendael,” was entitled Securing the Future: Strengthening the NPT. The Article VI Forum takes its name from the article of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in which the nuclear states commit themselves to the elimination of their nuclear weapons. States attending the session included Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Germany, Ireland, Malaysia, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, and Sweden. The first meeting of the forum took place at the United Nations in October 2005.

The second meeting of the forum was held as the United States and India concluded a nuclear technology deal, and international tensions concerning Iran’s nuclear program continued.

Senator Douglas Roche, O.C., Chairman of the Middle Powers Initiative, said the Article VI Forum of like-minded states and NGOs has “opened up a new approach: to examine key legal, political and technical issues that need to be addressed to overcome security concerns of the Nuclear Weapon States, which are currently preventing them from commencing negotiations leading to complete nuclear disarmament.” He added, “The very existence of the Article VI Forum is a sign of hope for the world community that wants to be freed from the spectre of nuclear warfare. Key states assembled here can indeed provide a jolt of energy into the nuclear disarmament process.”

Tariq Rauf, Head of Verification and Security Policy Coordination for the International Atomic Energy Agency, said the priorities should be to “re-affirm the goals we established for ourselves in 1970 under the NPT, affirmed in 1995 and re-affirmed in 2000 [at the NPT Review Conferences], and send a clear-cut message that our commitment to these goals has not changed.” Speaking in his personal capacity, he added, “We remain committed to ridding the world of nuclear weapons. We have zero tolerance for new States developing nuclear weapons, and we should ensure that all countries have the right to use nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.”

The forum was also attended by the distinguished nuclear physicists, Frank von Hippel and Jose Goldemberg, the co-chairs of the newly-formed International Panel on Fissile Materials. Members of the Panel oversaw a special plenary of the meeting dealing with proposals for a Fissile Materials Cutoff Treaty (FMCT) and the ramifications of verifying such a treaty. Despite the position of one major nuclear power, the experts insisted that an FMCT is

verifiable. They further argued a treaty would strengthen the NPT because it would create new standards for “international responsibility” and because it would reduce the discriminatory nature of the NPT since the nuclear weapons states would have more political and technical obligations under an FMCT than they now have under the NPT.

The political dilemma explored in the sessions dealing with political elements is that while nuclear disarmament is vital, it is not on the agenda of leaders and subsequently not in the public realm. Consequently, the political discussion focused on what mix of policy options had the best chance of being considered by governments, would be effective if implemented and also be able to capture the attention of the general public. Some of those initiatives are implementing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, negotiating a FMCT, de-alerting, implementing norms for transparency and irreversibility in arms control agreements, and reducing the role of nuclear weapons in military strategies.

The legal session focused on the effect the implementation of international law has on promoting nuclear disarmament. While it takes decades to build up the institutions of and respect for international law, panelists said, much can be done in the near term through improvement of national legal systems, and on the international level through respect for the NPT Article VI disarmament obligations. This is the tenth anniversary of the advisory opinion by the International Court of Justice on the legality of nuclear weapons; according to the panelists “the authoritative interpretation of Article VI of the NPT.” The Court unanimously concluded that under Article VI states are obligated to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations on nuclear disarmament. The disarmament obligations must be interpreted in light of the commitments made in 1995 and 2000. The most important are the principles of irreversibility, verification and transparency, the diminished role for nuclear weapons in security policies, and reduction in operational status of nuclear weapons.

In his speech, Rauf said, “It is time to abandon the unworkable notion that it is morally reprehensible for some countries to pursue nuclear weapons, but morally acceptable for others to rely on them. Our aim must be clear: a security structure that is based on our shared humanity and not on the ability of some to destroy us all.”

At the invitation of the government of Canada, the third meeting of Article VI Forum will be held in Ottawa, September 28-29, 2006. The Middle Powers Initiative is a program of the Global Security Institute, headed by Jonathan Granoff.

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