

# **UN Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review – Feedback from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade**

## **Bill Frilay reports**

Representatives of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade traveled to Melbourne on 21 July to brief NGOs on the outcomes of the five yearly review – held over 4 weeks in May in New York - on the UN Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

The NGOs were led by Dimity Hawkins and other members of International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN).

I have previously described on the SPC website<sup>1</sup> my interpretation (before the meeting with DFAT) of the outcomes.

The key points the DFAT representatives made were:

- The Conference was a “modest success”. Nobody was over the moon about the outcomes, nor was it a miserable failure like the 2005 Conference.
- There were positives such as the undertaking by all parties to disarm (although no date is given), and the proposed Nuclear Free Zone in the Middle East.
- Given entrenched positions, a first priority was to save the treaty, and the Action Plan (with 64 “actions”) was put together behind the scenes late in the conference and is a consensus document.
- A Nuclear Weapons Convention (as advocated by many anti-nuclear weapons NGOs) was widely supported but not by at least some of the Big Five (US, Russia, UK, China and France). The Big Five (the Nuclear Weapons States – or at least those recognised as such in the Treaty, as there are of course others) are not yet prepared to completely disarm.

There are severe limitations in a large conference where consensus must be achieved among about 190 parties. Lowest common denominator outcomes tend to be the rule of the day. Of course, the Big Five (Nuclear Weapon States) carry the most weight, and as I understand it, Russia in particular was the most hard line. But it wasn't just the Big Five. Strenuous efforts were made to obtain Iran's agreement. There were also efforts to get India (and probably others) to sign the NPT and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).

Critically, where do we go from here? It seems that the actions will be in other related fora. Amongst matters that DFAT will be looking at will be a Treaty on Fissile Materials. Close to home, there is the potential for a Pacific Nuclear Free Zone, and this is likely to be on the agenda for the forthcoming meeting of the Pacific Island Forum in Vanuatu. Most important will be continued work between the US and Russia on further disarmament under their START Treaty (between them, they

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.socialpolicyconnections.org.au/Portals/3/docs/Frilay.NPT%20REVCON.June2010.pdf>

account for about 90% of the weapons); and taking further the proposal for a Middle East Nuclear Free Zone.

There is also proposed in the NPT actions that the UN Conference on Disarmament establish a special body to address nuclear disarmament, though how successful this will be is not clear. And no doubt there will be continued efforts to try to obtain further signatories and ratification on some treaties.

It appears to me that there is room for progress, albeit nowhere near as fast as we would like, but that this will take place in bilateral or other fora, and not in the NPT itself. The big negatives are how does the world curb the nuclear ambitions by Iran (a Middle East Nuclear Free Zone is of course relevant here, but this will require Israel's commitment also) and North Korea, and the internal instability in Pakistan, and the potential dangers that this gives rise to.

We thanked the DFAT representatives for coming to Melbourne for the briefing.