

Despite movement on the Middle East, disappointment reigns over the outcome of the NPT conference

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Tony Robinson "Pressenza International Press Agency
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The NPT conference has come to an end after 4 weeks of intense debate and horse-trading in New York with little progress on disarmament. The Conference calls on Ban Ki-Moon to convene a conference to work on a nuclear weapon free zone in the Middle East. NGOs are disappointed by lack of progress on a convention to ban weapons and by the proliferation of nuclear energy.

Not much closer to disarmament after 4 weeks in New York

PressenzaUnited Nations, New York, 2010-05-29After four weeks of intense debate and negotiations in New York the 8th NPT review conference came to an end with little for nuclear abolitionists to celebrate.

Although there has been a marked difference with the 2005 round of negotiations where a Bush led administration in the US was widely blamed for the failure of the conference with the US blaming Iran and North Korea, this 2010 edition was basking in the new climate of optimism generated as a result of President Obama's election to the White House.

US Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton sought to reinforce this atmosphere when she spoke to the conference on the first Monday saying, "I represent a President and a country committed to a vision of a world without nuclear weapons and to taking the concrete steps necessary that will help us get there."

Sadly though, this optimism had already been rather undermined by the astonishingly discourteous spectacle of the US, British and French delegations walking out of the address given by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad just prior to the US intervention in proceedings.

He criticised Nuclear Weapon States (NWS) for seeking dominance, blamed the United States for proliferation, and condemned US deterrence policies for the more than 20,000 weapons in the world. "The Government of the United States has not only used nuclear weapons, but also continues to threaten to use such weapons... against Iran." He pointed out the hypocrisy of NWS for preventing non-NWS from exercising their "inalienable" right to nuclear energy and accused the USA of "double standards" over its acceptance of Israeli nuclear weapons.

In reply, Clinton, critical of Iran's lack of transparency over its uranium enrichment programme and non-compliance with IAEA regulations, countered, "This morning, Iran's President offered the same tired, false, and sometimes wild accusations against the United States and other parties at this conference. But that's not surprising. As you all heard this morning, Iran will do whatever it can to divert attention away from its own record and to attempt to evade accountability." Iran's lack of transparency and striving for increasingly enriched uranium probably does belie its claim that it is only interested in peaceful uses, however given Washington's belligerent attitude and Israel's secret nuclear arsenal, Tehran presumably sees nuclear technology as its best insurance policy against an Iraq-style "regime change" invasion

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by the US and allies.

During and prior to the NPT conference the UN Secretary General sought to promote his own 5 point plan to achieve nuclear disarmament which includes the creation of a legally binding treaty to eliminate weapons. However his efforts, although backed by the majority of countries present, were systematically blocked by the P5 permanent members of the Security Council, arguably with the exception of China. The UK, although hampered in their participation by a General Election in the first week of the conference, were swift to join in the emasculation of proposals to advance in the direction of disarmament coming out of the work of the three Main Committees.

To the dismay of NGOs, despite all the lobbying to include a timetable to start talks on the negotiation of a Nuclear Weapons Convention to abolish the weapons, all the final document ended up doing was "noting" the proposal.

NGOs had already been alarmed regarding the so-called "third pillar" of the treaty regarding the "inalienable" right of nations to develop peaceful uses of nuclear technology. NGO observers who are also seeking to promote the phasing out of nuclear energy to the benefit of renewable sources found themselves in what at times was reported to feel like a "nuclear energy trade fare", with the IAEA, the P5 and the nuclear industry pushing the "green" and "clean" image of nuclear power.

The only concrete thing seemingly to come out of the final review document was the call for the UN Secretary General to convene a Conference in 2012 with Middle East states to establish "a Middle East Zone free of Nuclear Weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction". However, given Israel's refusal to admit possession of nuclear weapons and not even being a signatory to the NPT, it remains to be seen if this will transform into anything other than hopeful words in an otherwise disappointing final document.

NGOs though refuse to be resigned to five years of inaction. In a statement issued by the Abolition Caucus of NGOs present at the NPT conference, they said, "We have had to resign ourselves to the likelihood that this will not be a breakthrough Conference, and that the outcome, whether or not it is regarded as successful by the participants, has fallen short of that essential objective. The gap between reassuring rhetoric about nuclear disarmament and real programs to rid the world of nuclear weapons is unacceptably wide at the end of this Conference.

We have not resigned ourselves to another five years without an action plan for the abolition of nuclear weapons. Upon the conclusion of this Review Conference, NGOs will immediately reach out to those States who have voiced support for a Nuclear Weapons Convention, and will explore steps we can take together to build a global foundation for such a treaty."

UPDATE

Israel rejects Middle East nuclear talks plan as "hypocritical"

Großansicht des Bildes mit der Bildunterschrift: Netanyahu says the treaty is "deeply flawed"

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Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu said on Saturday Israel will not take part in a UN-led conference in 2012 designed to achieving a nuclear arms-free Middle East. The plan was proposed at a UN meeting in New York.

Israel denounced the planned meeting which is backed by nearly 200 nations, signatories of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the cornerstone of global disarmament efforts.

"This resolution is deeply flawed and hypocritical," Netanyahu said during a visit to Toronto, Canada, on Saturday.

"It ignores the realities of the Middle East and the real threats facing the region and the entire world," he insisted.

Israel singled out

His comments came after an agreement reached on Friday at the 2010 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) review conference in New York, which calls for the conference on a nuclear-free Middle East. Some 189 nations agreed to the 28-page document following a month-long conference on strengthening the NPT.

The agreement makes special mention of Israel, stressing "the importance of Israel's accession to the treaty and the placement of all its nuclear facilities under comprehensive IAEA safeguards."

"It singles out Israel, the Middle East's only true democracy and the only country threatened with annihilation," Netanyahu said.

The NPT treaty did not mention other nuclear powers that have not signed up to the non-proliferation treaty, such as India, Pakistan and Iran.

Netanyahu has the backing of US President Barack Obama, who said on Friday that "we [the US] strongly oppose actions that jeopardize Israel's national security."

Israel is widely believed to have nuclear weapons, but it refuses to deny or acknowledge their existence.

EU approval

Earlier On Saturday, Europe's top diplomat praised the NPT conference.

"I warmly welcome the consensus reached by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference," said EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton in a statement. "This shows that the multilateral non-proliferation and disarmament regime is alive and supported by all."

It was the first agreement in 10 years on the NPT, which has set the global agenda for fighting the spread of nuclear weapons since 1970.

Diplomats at the conference approved on Friday a final document that laid out action plans on the three pillars of the treaty - disarmament, non-proliferation and the promotion of peaceful atomic energy.

Bildunterschrift: Großansicht des Bildes mit der Bildunterschrift: Ashton thinks halting the spread of nuclear weapons is an important goal

Currently there are 189 NPT member countries, five of which are recognized as nuclear weapon states: the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France and China.

The parties taking part in the conference called on North Korea to return to negotiations to settle the dispute over its own nuclear activities.

ng/smh/dpa/AFP

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