



News In Review

A collection of NGO views on the NPT Review 2000

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UN Office: 777 UN Plaza, New York, NY 10017. phone (212) 682-1265 Fax: (212) 286-8211 E-mail: wilpfun@igc.org

Int Secretariat: 1, rue de Varembe, C.P.28, 1211 Geneva 20, Switzerland. Phone: (+41 22) 733-6175 E-mail: wilpf@iprolink.ch

Now Please Try

After a day of listening to lengthy speeches, many of them repeating the importance of the treaty, the set backs, positive developments, challenges and hopes for a positive review conference, NGOs are looking forward to the first meetings of Main Committees I (disarmament) & II (safeguards & NWFZ) today.

The General Debate will continue in the General Assembly, and while observers will listen hard for the nuances and new ideas contained in the speeches, the statements are mostly predictable, with some notable exceptions: Colombia and Sweden. (for speech texts: www.basicint.org, for detailed analysis: www.acronym.org.uk)

Ambassador Reyes of Colombia delivered a to-the-point intervention, addressing the immediate concerns of this Review Conference: the need for concrete measures to be executed in the next five years and the need for NPT states parties to take up the responsibilities imposed by the new Review Process, the means through which the treaty will keep its validity. These ideas, and the urgency for action expressed by Anna Lindh of Sweden will inform NGO activity in the coming weeks.

NGOs were pleased to note the press coverage of the NPT in major world newspapers yesterday, the results of successful international networking between those attending the conference and those waiting to act on information received in national capitals.

Felicity Hill
Director UN Office
WILPF

The Peaceful Cancer?

Fourteen years ago, the design flaw in a RBMK-type 90 MW nuclear reactor caused a dramatic power surge when the operators attempted to shut it down. A subsequent nuclear explosion put a place called Chernobyl on the map forever as a glowing hot spot.

Radiation rained over parts of Europe, illustrating that radiation does not understand Article 2 & 51 of the UN Charter. 800,000 "liquidators" were brought from all over the former Soviet Union to help "clean up" the mess. The World Health Organisation has collected clear, irrefutable documentation and evidence of the radiation effects on these people, many of whom have died. Local inhabitants, especially children are carrying a new cocktail of cancers, leukemias and what the IAEA likes to call "radiation phobia."

An exhibition of paintings done by a laboratory artist of normal grass bugs seen side by side with specimens collected at Chernobyl and Three Mile Island was a hideous moment for me. I can only see the legs growing out of eye sockets, the multiple deformities, as metaphors for the mutated logic exhibited by the most fervent advocates on disarmament when discussing Article IV of the NPT.

NGOs understand the history of this treaty. Not allowing the five Nuclear Weapon States to completely monopolise the atom explains some of the genesis of Article IV. However, in the face of clear health, environmental and economic evidence we fail to see how it is an "inalienable right" to protect the profits of a polluting industry that has not delivered cheap energy to the global south. Instead it has damaged the gene pool, it has created debt in the south and has also provided future generations with a reminder of just how wrong politicised science can be. We know better now. We know more than we did in 1945 and 1968 about the polluting, expensive, cancer causing danger of the so-called peaceful atom.

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The following are brief glimpses of some media coverage following the first day of the NPT. First paragraphs are included here only.

Japanese Media: Mainichi Shimbun [Japan], Monday, April 24, 2000 NPT review

“Former Swedish Disarmament Minister Alva Myrdal likened the arms reduction process to the fate of Sisyphus, the king in Greek mythology who was doomed in Hades to roll uphill a giant stone that always rolls down again. This story also applies to the excruciating slowness of progress under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).”

Pakistan Media: The NEWS [Karachi] 24 April 2000

“90 speakers to voice views at NPT Conference

By Farah Zahra

NEW YORK: The First Review Conference of the NPT (Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty) of the new millennium begins here at the United Nations on Monday. 90 speakers from States Party to the NPT, including 20 Foreign Ministers have arrived here to voice their concerns on the spread of nuclear weapons throughout the world. Having gained indefinite extension in 1995, the NPT today stands at a juncture where Non Nuclear Weapon States (NWS) are losing faith in a regime that does not seem to be working.”

India Media: TIMES OF INDIA [Delhi], 25 April 2000

“Missile defenses may lead to arms race: Annan

UNITED NATIONS: U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan on Monday warned that growing pressure to deploy national missile defenses “could well lead to a new arms race.”

But U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright countered that a way should be found to mount a limited defense against new threats.”

Irish Media: Irish Times, [Ireland] 25 April 2000

“Cowen says new approach needed to nuclear weapons

By Christine Newman

The elimination of nuclear weapons at the earliest date would require political determination and a fundamental change in approach by all, the Minister for Foreign Affairs told the United Nations yesterday.

Mr Cowen, speaking at the opening session of the UN review conference on the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, warned that without serious new steps to underpin its purposes and provisions, the treaty would wither away through complacency and neglect.”

What Does NPT Stand For?

Now Please Try
No Plutonium Thanks
Notorious Political Threat
No Perfect Treaty
No Problem Treated
Nuclear Posture Terrorism
Nuclear Policy Trash
Needs Public Testing
Nuclear Policy Tested
Nuclear Pathology Testing
Never Partiticipate in Targeting
Nasty Pleasures Tested
Nasty Policies Testbed
Nuclear Project Torture
Non-nuclear Prophecies Tested
Never Play with Treaties
Nuclear Priest's Theology
Necessary Policies Tested
Nuclear Powers Treaty
New Permanent Torture
Nuclear Positions Tortured

Can you think of any more?

Song Competition Entry

To the Tune of Danny Boy

In a lonely Holloway Prison
Where the Greenham women lay
All around them doors were locking
And their sisters far away
Tell me this before I go, judge
Tell me this before I go
Will my soul pass through our Greenham
Tell me this before I go.

Will it pass that warm camp fire?
Will it pass the plastic sheet?
When I used to spend my hours
Drowning in the mud and sleet
When you see those Greenham women
let them know and understand
That their sisters went a-singing
for to save this lovely land
That their sisters went a-singing
for to save this lovely land.

Post-Chernobyl genetic disasters

On March 1, 2000 it was reported that Post-Soviet Belarus has been plunged into a demographic disaster, with soaring levels of infertility and genetic changes 14 years after the Chernobyl disaster in neighbouring Ukraine, doctors said yesterday.

"Science cannot yet assess the consequences of the Chernobyl accident, but it is plain that a demographic catastrophe has occurred in Belarus," Vladislav Ostapenko, head of Belarus' radiation medicine institute, told a news conference.

"It is clear that we are seeing genetic changes, especially among those who were less than six years of age when subjected to radiation. These people are now starting families."

Belarus, a country of 10 million downwind from Chernobyl, bore the brunt of the April 26, 1986 explosion and fire in the power station's fourth reactor.

One quarter of Belarusian territory was subjected to severe contamination and tens of thousands of people were evacuated from their homes. Radiation from Chernobyl spread throughout most of Europe, but Belarus, Ukraine and Russia were worst hit and still devote huge resources to 'cleanup' operations.

Ostapenko said that within seven years of the accident, mortality rates were outstripping birth rates.

Girls in affected areas had five times the normal rate of deformations in their reproductive systems and boys three times the norm. Each year, 2,500 births were recorded with genetic abnormalities and 500 pregnancies were terminated after testing.

Thousands of cases of thyroid cancer, rare in areas not subject to high radiation levels, have been recorded in Belarus' "risk zone", where a million people still live. High levels of radiation have now been observed among teenagers.

"We are seeing problems of infertility in this generation," he said. "Exactly the sort of observations we saw in animals subjected to similar radiation [exposure]."

Belarus, Ostapenko said, needed more outside help to cope with the consequences. "It is impossible to say whether we are over the peak of the consequences of radioactive contamination or whether we are just on the threshold."

Gennady Lazyuk, head of a state institute for hereditary diseases, said the aftermath of the accident was compounded by ills associated with post-Soviet hardship.

"Of course this is a complex problem and includes low living standards, alcoholism and poor nutrition," he said. "Regardless, in contaminated areas the growth rate in genetic abnormalities is more than twice as high as in uncontaminated areas."

REUTERS NEWS SERVICE

Britain to help replace Chernobyl Reactors

On Wednesday 12 April, 2000, the UK Government announced it was ready to help finance new nuclear power stations so Ukraine can shut down its crippled Chernobyl power plant.

Kiev has refused to close the power station, scene of the world's worst civilian nuclear accident in April 1986, until Western states stump up cash for reactors at two other facilities to replace the lost output. "We are willing to help fund the reactors to replace Chernobyl and I will be saying more of that when I see President (Leonid) Kuchma" Britain's Foreign Secretary Robin Cook said during a visit to Kiev.

"The basis of our agreement is that Chernobyl must close in the interest of the world and also in the interest of the people of Ukraine," he said.

Cook did not say how much money London was ready to put forward.

On March 29th the Ukrainian government ordered the Energy Ministry to draw up a detailed three-month plan to wind down Chernobyl's reactor number three, the only one still in operation.

But officials warned Chernobyl's definitive closure by an agreed end-of-year deadline remained linked to a massive cash injection by the West. In 1995, the Group of Seven leading industrial nations promised 3.1 billion dollars to fund its closure, but the agreement stumbled on reluctance by some European states to finance Ukraine's nuclear industry. Ukraine wants part of the funds to pay for the completion of substitute reactors at the Rivne and Khmelnytsky nuclear power stations in western Ukraine.

Experts say radiation equivalent to 500 times that released by the atom bomb dropped on Hiroshima was measured in the atmosphere around Chernobyl after the explosion on this day in 1986. A concrete sarcophagus was hastily erected over the shattered reactor core but experts are warning that cracks are now apparent over 10 percent of its surface and the structure is in danger of collapse.

taken from AFP

Editors' Note: Five years ago, Robin Cook as the shadow foreign secretary, wrote an article in *the Guardian* newspaper about the then NPT Review conference, wherein he stated "It would never be rational or legitimate to use nuclear weapons first, and we should not hesitate to announce formally such a basic principle as official policy." What's the hold up Mr. Cook? After three years in government, 'new' Labour has failed to institute a "no first use policy". In fact, UK Prime Minister, Tony Blair (another previous card carrying member of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament), emphasised the need for the US and UK to maintain the right to threaten a pre-emptive nuclear strike.

Kiev, Ukraine -- Fourteen years after the world's worst nuclear disaster, the Chernobyl power plant is still killing people, Ukraine's Health Ministry said yesterday.

Some 3.5 million people, more than a third of them children, have fallen ill as a result of the contamination, while the incidence of some cancers is 10 times the national average.

"The health of people affected by the Chernobyl accident is getting worse and worse every year," Deputy Health Minister Olha Bobyleva told a news conference.

Chernobyl's No. 4 reactor exploded in the early hours of April 26, 1986, spreading a poisonous radioactive cloud over much of Ukraine, Russia, Belarus and parts of Western Europe. Soviet officials, who initially tried to hush up the tragedy, acknowledged in the end that the accident had killed 31 people and affected thousands more. But the real scale of the catastrophe, which displaced hundreds of thousands of people and turned bustling villages and towns into ghost towns, has turned out to be far greater than once thought.

Official data show that the health of 3.5 million people, including 1.3 million children, was affected in this impoverished nation of 50 million. Children, as well as emergency workers sent in to clean up the contaminated areas, are among the worst affected.

The death rate among those living in contaminated areas is more than 18 per cent per 1,000, compared with a national average of less than 15 per cent.

Ms. Bobyleva said radiation had led to an outbreak of diseases of the nervous, blood and respiratory systems. She said the rate of these diseases among children affected by the accident was 17 per cent higher than the national average.

The rate of thyroid cancer remains 10 times higher than normal among Ukrainian children. The ministry reported 1,400 cases of thyroid cancer between 1986 and 2000, while no cases were registered between 1981 and 1985.

Ms. Bobyleva said the ministry was also worried about an increase in deaths of emergency workers, most of whom are still under 50. The death rate in the group is double the national average. Ukraine has promised it will close Chernobyl's last operational reactor by the end of this year.

OLENA HORODETSKA

Globe and Mail (Canada), Saturday, April 22, 2000

"On the 14th anniversary of the Chernobyl catastrophe the time has come to challenge Article 4. How much longer must the world wait for the lessons of Chernobyl to filter through to the NPT Review Conference? The only way out of this is to generate the political will to establish a benign energy agency to replace the unacceptable role of the IAEA in continuing to promote more potential Chernobyls."

Commander Rob Green, RN (Ret'd)

Quote of the Day

When an atomic bomb explodes, as it was clear in the cases where it was used, it doesn't discriminate against combatants and civil population, or between schools and barracks. And any right disappears at the same time that human beings do. To say it in other words, any defence doctrine should incorporate as a priority the respect of the international humanitarian law and the human security. In this sense, it is evident that the multilateral calendar could be more coherent.

**Ambassador Reyes,
Colombia**

Chelyabinsk-65 (Mayak)

The Mayak [Beacon] Chemical Complex, commonly known by its code name of Chelyabinsk-65, is the oldest and largest of the former Soviet Union's three plutonium production centers. The highly contaminated site is about 70 kilometers north of the city of Chelyabinsk (population 1.1 million) on the eastern flank of the Ural Mountains, about 1,750 kilometers east of Moscow. It lies in a region of interconnecting lakes, marshes, waterways, and artificial reservoirs at the headwaters of the 240-kilometer long Techa River.

Most of the plutonium production facilities at Chelyabinsk-65 are concentrated in a 90-square-kilometer area on the southeast shore of Lake Kyzyltash near Lake Irtysh, the source of the Techa River. A number of dams were built along the Techa to create reservoirs so as to prevent radioactivity from flowing downstream. The Techa River first flows into the Iset' River and then into the Tobol, the Irtysh, and finally the massive Ob' River. The Ob' flows on for another 1,500 kilometers before reaching its mouth at the base of the Kara Sea above the Arctic Circle.

Apart from seven nuclear reactors within the Chelyabinsk-65 complex (the five graphite-moderated reactors are shut down), the complex contains an enormous operational infrastructure including: an operating reprocessing plant and storage facility for plutonium; a separate reprocessing plant for special isotopes; a partially constructed mixed-oxide fuel fabrication plant for breeder reactors and four smaller mixed-oxide fuel facilities (two are still operating); the South Urals Atomic Energy Station; and nuclear waste storage and treatment facilities, including about 60 high-level waste storage tanks and a vitrification plant for high-level liquid wastes.

Work was suspended on the mixed-oxide fuel plant in 1987 due to strong public protests and a lack of funds. The plant was designed to make mixed-oxide fuel rods for three breeders reactors which were to be built at the South Urals Atomic Energy Station. Construction on those reactors was begun in 1984 and suspended in 1987. Russia is soliciting international aid to complete the project, especially from Japan.

While the Chelyabinsk regional parliament passed a vote in support of resuming construction in 1990, public outcry against the decision forced a referendum on the issue in March of 1991. Voters defeated both the proposal for the breeder reactors as well as a decision to import more civilian spent fuel from abroad for plutonium reprocessing and waste vitrification.

The site's various discharges of radioactive waste have had serious radiological consequences. The Mayak officials tried several methods for disposing of the wastes from Chelyabinsk-65's reprocessing operations, first pouring them directly into the Techa River, then into open lakes, and finally storing them for decay in steel tanks before draining some of them off. All these techniques resulted in far-reaching ecological disasters

that the Soviet government covered up for decades.

At Mayak, water for cooling the reactors was taken from Lake Kyzyltash and after cooling was discharged back into the lake. From 1948 to 1951, all of Mayak's liquid reprocessing wastes from its reactors were discharged directly into the Techa River, about six kilometers below its source. Mayak continued to release intermediate- and low-level radioactive wastes into the river until 1956.

A radiation survey of the area done in the summer of 1951 documented extensive radioactive contamination in the riverbed and its floodplain, with isotopes from the plant detected as far away as the Arctic Ocean. The survey also found high levels of exposure and disease among the 124,000 people living along the Techa and Tobol rivers, especially 28,100 people in 38 villages along the Techa. None of them had been informed or warned about the dangers of using the water for drinking, bathing, or washing. The greatest civilian exposure was in the village of Metlino, downstream from the release point.

The magnitude of the reported problems must have been severe, since authorities banned all public use of the river and fenced off much of the floodplain. Wells were dug in some villages to provide alternative sources of water, and a military guard enforced the restrictions. But officials never gave villagers any explanation for the prohibitions, which were widely ignored as the river was used not just for drinking but also for irrigating gardens, fishing, bathing, washing and the watering of cattle and fowl. Evacuation of villages began only in 1953 and took until 1960 to complete. The government eventually relocated 7,500 people from 22 villages.

The Techa river still poses a health risk to those who live along it. The river now cascades from Lake Kyzyltash through the reservoirs created by the dams along the Techa. Now that the reactors are shut down and no longer draw water from the system, site officials are concerned that the reservoirs might overflow. The water levels in these reservoirs and in Lake Kyzyltash were close to the maximum in 1992, and the complex continues to dump 5.5 million cubic meters of residential sewage and low-level radioactive wastes into the system every year.

Lake Karachay (one of the reservoirs) is probably the world's most radioactive open body of water. The highest readings have been recorded near the plant's discharge pipe, where the radioactivity is at a high enough level to give an adult a lethal dose in less than one hour.

Arjun Makhijani

excerpts from *Nuclear Wastelands:*

A Global Guide to Nuclear Weapons Production and It's Health and Environmental Effects

Vox Populis

“We want to see some reality injected into the debate for the NPT to ensure that people really understand that there is a starting point and there is an ending point - between is disarmament - but there are lives of people who are affected at the point of extraction and production of uranium, right through to the storage of toxic waste.”

Jacqui Katona

Gundjehmi Aboriginal Corporation

- working for the Mirrar people against the Jabiluka uranium mine in Australia
extract of speech at the demonstration outside the UN 25 April 2000

Week Two of the Conference will include:

The Truth Commission

Featuring testimony from:

ROB GREEN, retired UK Naval Commander
JACQUI KATONA, Australian Aboriginal activist
PILULA KHUS, Native American activist
MARY OSBORN, Three Mile Island downwinder
RICHARD SALVADOR, Pacific Islander
SETSUKE THURLOW, Hiroshima survivor
ANDREAS TOUPADAKIS, former chemist, Lawrence Livermore National Lab

The aim of this unique event, taking place in conjunction with the NPT Review Conference, is to further the disclosure of knowledge and personal experience with regard to the nuclear issue by creating a forum for former military personnel, nuclear scientists and workers, and representatives from the downwind and indigenous communities.

Hearing and telling nuclear stories acts as a means to affirm each individual's experience and empower people to work toward the abolition of nuclear weapons, the safe containment of radioactive materials, and to encourage transparency and openness in nuclear decision making.

Project EDNA aims to give voice to those who have been adversely affected by the global consequences of nuclear weapons and nuclear power production with a view to communicating these experiences to future generations.

Monday 1st May 2000
at the UN Church Centre
777 UN Plaza, New York NY 10017

for more information contact:
(212) 682-1265 or kathleen@projectdna.org

What's On

26 April 2000

event:

Seminar Day 3: "Nuclear Disarmament and the Rule of Law" - last day of this seminar

place & time:

UN Headquarters @ 10 - 11.30am

event:

"Back to the World Court?/The Relevance of the Nuclear Weapons Opinion Today."

place & time:

UN Conference Room C @ 1.30 - 4.30 pm

event:

Day One: 9th International Health and Environment Conference
"Solutions for the Millennium" - first of a 3 day conference - pre-registration required for admission

place & time:

UN Headquarters @ all day

Editors for the News in Review are:

Dimity Hawkins
Penelope Simons and
Kathleen Sullivan

You can contact us through:

the WILPF Offices
6th Floor
777 UN Plaza
New York

e-mail: wilpfun@igc.org
*your input and feedback
are welcome*