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“Disarmament as Humanitarian Action: From Perspective to Practice”

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SEMINAR REPORT

“Until recently, the arms control and disarmament debate was focused almost entirely on external threats to states, especially those posed by other states. In our rapidly globalizing world, however, the range of threats to security has become much wider. These threats include the indiscriminate spread of small arms and light weapons, the effects of mines and explosive remnants of war and potentially other threats relating to new technologies, some of which are still under development. All threats come at great cost of lives and prospects for development. Thus, the success of humanitarian efforts is closely linked to the effectiveness of multilateral disarmament efforts. Both would benefit from an understanding of the way “human security” and disarmament interact.”

Dr. Bernard Bot, Minister of Foreign Affairs of The Netherlands*

Introduction

For several years, UNIDIR has been rethinking the relationship between multilateral negotiations in disarmament and arms control and humanitarian action as part of its work. In 2004, with generous assistance from the Governments of Norway and The Netherlands, UNIDIR began a research project entitled “Disarmament as Humanitarian Action: Making Multilateral Negotiations Work”. Based on the recognition that a greater humanitarian focus is relevant to disarmament and arms control processes, the project is concerned with developing practical proposals on how humanitarian perspectives can be applied in functional terms to assist negotiators.

As part of the *Disarmament as Humanitarian Action* project’s work and as a continuation of events to celebrate the Institute’s 25th Anniversary, UNIDIR hosted a seminar on 12 June 2006 in the Council Chamber of the Palais des Nations in Geneva. The seminar was attended by representatives of diplomatic Missions, UN

* J. Borrie & V. Martin Randin (eds.), *Disarmament as Humanitarian Action: From Perspective to Practice*, Geneva: UNIDIR: 2006, p. ix.

and other international agencies, representatives of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), researchers, the media and members of the general public.

The seminar and the discussion that followed examined the role of humanitarian perspectives to inform and enhance the work of policy makers and multilateral negotiators in disarmament and arms control:

- Mr. Martin Bell (OBE) shared his reflections, as UNICEF UK Ambassador for Humanitarian Emergencies, Independent Member of Parliament, writer and a former BBC war correspondent, about the human costs of armed conflict and responses to it;
- Dr. Gro Nystuen, Chair of the Norwegian Government Petroleum Fund Advisory Council on Ethics, discussed Norway's *Government Pension Fund – Global* and the implications of ethical investment policies for multilateral disarmament and arms control;
- Ms. Rosy Cave, Lead Researcher on Explosive Remnants of War on UNIDIR's project on *European Action on Small Arms, Light Weapons and Explosive Remnants of War*, presented her analysis of lessons to be learned from comparing government/civil society cooperation in negotiations leading to the 1997 treaty banning anti-personnel mines with later work to develop a protocol on explosive remnants of war in the context of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons; and
- Mr. John Borrie, Leader of the 'Disarmament as Humanitarian Action' project at UNIDIR, talked about his team's ongoing research and what it means for multilateral practitioners.
- A discussion with the seminar's participants followed the presentations under Chatham House rules (not summarized here).

The views expressed by speakers were their sole responsibility and do not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of the United Nations, UNIDIR (including the "Disarmament as Humanitarian Action" project), UNIDIR staff members or sponsors.

Mr. Martin Bell

Mr. Bell reflected on his experiences as witness to the destructive results of war and the human costs of modern-day weapons. Recently, he said, he visited the Democratic Republic of the Congo in his role as UNICEF ambassador: he described the humanitarian situation there as a "nightmare" and a shocking reminder of the prevalence of child soldiers, civilian casualties and rape. He said this highlighted the importance of arms control measures and the acknowledgement of the danger that modern warfare poses to the world, and especially to civilians.

Mr. Bell was critical of the media's tendency to simplify disturbing stories and to gloss over distressing images of human suffering which conflict creates. This

separation of the public from the reality of conflict by the media had created a “spectacle” of war. He went on to argue that the critical faculty of the media is often missing, as illustrated by military euphemisms that have become commonplace in its reporting. This contributed to the desensitization of electors and policy makers in liberal democracies. In addition, military means were more likely to be readily resorted to by politicians lacking personal experience of military service (indeed, there were instances of those even having sought to evade it) or a sufficient understanding of war and its consequences.

It was easy for people to forget that, as an instrument of policy, war almost never worked as intended, Mr. Bell said. He called for an increased effort by the media to show the human costs of war in their true light and for policymakers to work harder to curb arms proliferation and humanitarian crises, including through multilateral efforts, because these efforts—or lack of them—have tangible consequences.

Dr. Gro Nystuen

Dr. Nystuen explained the policies of *The Norwegian Government Pension Fund – Global*, and, in particular, the weapons-related recommendations of its Council on Ethics. The Fund, which was started in Norway in 1990, is a large one with approximately 200 billion Euros at its disposal. The Fund was implemented with two ethical principles in mind: first, to ensure that future generations benefit from the Fund through its investments and, second, to ensure that, while securing returns, the Fund should not be complicit in seriously unethical conduct.

To follow these principles, the Fund developed three major guidelines which are to Exercise Ownership Rights, conduct Negative Screening on all companies considered for investment and to use Ad-hoc Exclusion as a means of preventing investment in companies that are involved in unethical activities relating to serious human rights violations, and violations of individuals’ rights in war or conflict; severe environmental damage; gross corruption and other particularly serious violations of fundamental ethical norms. For example, if, after investigation, the Council on Ethics determined that a company produces weapons that through normal use may violate fundamental humanitarian principles, a recommendation would be published outlining these findings. The Norwegian Ministry of Finance, which administers the Fund, might take up these recommendations and, in practice, usually did so.

Dr. Nystuen said that, by stigmatizing companies that engage in unethical practices, the reports encouraged others to invest in companies that respect fundamental ethical norms. Although the power of investment strategies in humanitarian efforts should not be overestimated, ‘ethical investment’ policies were steps in the right direction and potentially important in bolstering the protection of human rights and discouraging the production of weapons and their components like anti-personnel mines and cluster munitions.

More information about the activities of the *Norwegian Government Pension Fund–Global* and its Council on Ethics is available online at: <<http://odin.dep.no/etikkradet/english/bn.html>>

Ms. Rosy Cave

Ms. Cave presented an overview of her recent chapter in the *Disarmament as Humanitarian Action* project's second volume of research, entitled "Disarmament as Humanitarian Action? Comparing Negotiations on Anti-Personnel Mines and Explosive Remnants of War". In this chapter, she compared the "Ottawa Process" in the mid-1990s to ban anti-personnel mines and the negotiations in the context of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) on Protocol V on Explosive Remnants of War in 2003. In particular, the level and nature of cooperation between civil society and governments—or the so-called "new model of diplomacy"—during these negotiations was examined.

Ms. Cave argued in her presentation that, while some of the governments and NGOs were the same during both negotiations, profound differences existed between the two processes. The Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention was initiated outside the traditional multilateral negotiating framework and was, to a large extent, a reaction to the failure of these orthodox responses. Its core actors were, in large part, self-selecting. By contrast, without massive public pressure and the influence of a large number of mobilized NGOs in the CCW context, national military interests took center stage in work on Protocol V. In addition, the partnership between developed countries and least-developed countries on the anti-personnel mine issue prompted worldwide interest: 122 countries signed the Mine Ban Convention. Since the spread of the CCW's membership was biased toward developed states, however, fewer countries showed interest in the 2003 negotiations and the rate of accession to this new international legal instrument has been slower.

Moreover, although there were a few active NGOs in CCW negotiations on Protocol V, this work did not actively involve a large coalition of NGOs like the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL). To some extent, however, civil society's game plan on explosive remnants of war replicated that of past campaigns. Ms. Cave said that what was an effective strategy in the past (like the ICBL model) would not necessarily work in the future, especially on outstanding issues like dealing with the humanitarian problems caused by cluster munitions. New ideas, better coordination and increased efforts to broaden the public appeal of the issue would be needed to ensure progress. This would entail inevitable difficulties because of the level of financial dependence of many NGOs on governments, whom they would need to put under pressure despite the risk of offending them.

Ms. Rosy Cave's chapter, along with the rest of the *Disarmament as Humanitarian Action* project's second volume of research, can be downloaded at: <http://www.unidir.org/bdd/fiche-ouvrage.php?ref_ouvrage=92-9045-182-3-en>

Mr. John Borrie

Mr. Borrie delivered a presentation entitled “What do we mean by thinking outside the box?”. He observed that, in recent years, multilateral policy makers had talked a lot about the need to “think outside the box” in order to make their efforts more effective. However, it was not always clear what they meant by this, beyond recognition that orthodox approaches are not working very well and that they would like a better return on their investment in multilateral processes.

In exploring this question, Mr. Borrie unpacked the *Disarmament as Humanitarian Action* project’s themes and described aspects of its ongoing research.

- The project’s first major theme is to show how human security and humanitarian approaches can contribute in practical terms to making disarmament and arms control work more effective, which was the focus of the project’s second volume of work launched at the seminar.
- The second theme examines how multilateral disarmament negotiations can become more effective in *systemic* terms—the focus of his subsequent presentation.

Using examples from areas of research such as complexity science, cognitive psychology, neuroeconomics and behavioural economics, Mr. Borrie argued that there were uncomfortable truths to be acknowledged by multilateral practitioners. First, many multilateral disarmament and arms control processes do not work very well and that, in response to these problems, collective international security responses are old wine in new—and virtually identical—bottles too much of the time. States would always have their differences and may not choose to cooperate for good reason, he said. But this should not obscure the fact that the threshold for worthwhile cooperation to occur could be reduced by thinking carefully about how we design and operate multilateral processes as well as the constraints all of us operate within cognitively. This included being prepared to be more critical of the *community of practice* that has gradually arisen around multilateral diplomacy. Multilateral institutions needed to be more ergonomic for negotiators’ brains, in view of the increased stress and strain put on them by an ever more complex world, he argued.

The second uncomfortable truth (and one that, in Mr. Borrie’s view, was usually not acknowledged) is that cognitive constraints are a big part of the box diplomats keep saying they need to think outside of. Disarmament was more likely to be effective with greater input from the field and with individual human beings—not only their governments—as reference points. However, disarmament as humanitarian action could also be the recognition that our humanity has a cognitive dimension as well as a moral or political one, and that these threads are woven indivisibly.

Mr. Borrie said that this knowledge would help multilateral negotiators be more effective, as the further work of the project would show. Its third volume, due to be published in late 2006, would include chapters explaining why complexity science mattered to understanding some of the social phenomena related to armed violence, analysis of the cognitive constraints on negotiators as well as examples of models of armed violence using statistics and mathematical non-linear differential equations. There would also be other types of analysis offering new tools for, and perspectives from, diplomats, NGO analysts and researchers focusing on analysis of negotiating tactics and the roles of civil society. None of these perspectives would be magic solutions to multilateral problems, Mr. Borrie said. But, they could help in reframing current issues and casting fresh light on the most appropriate responses.

More information about UNIDIR's *Disarmament as Humanitarian Action* project is available online at: <http://www.unidir.ch/bdd/fiche-activite.php?ref_activite=275>