

There's No Excuse for Having Nuclear Weapons, Says Brazil

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As the month-long 2005 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) continued, the world's most vulnerable nations drew the attention of participants to the human, environmental and economic risks posed by the shipment of nuclear materials, as well as the issue of State responsibility in the event of accidents.

Brazil's ambassador to the United Nations and the president of the Security Council, Ronaldo Mota Sardenberg said that the NPT is the cornerstone of a stable and successful regime of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, and it, therefore, is crucial for the maintenance of international peace and security.

A balanced implementation of all of the Treaty commitments is of essence, in order to preserve its integrity. That latter should be at the forefront of considerations at the Conference, said Sardenberg.

According to him every nation has high stakes in the promotion of nuclear disarmament, peaceful development and use of nuclear material, as well as in the NPT's non-proliferation goals.

He shared the concerns of the international community regarding the threats to the NPT regime, both persistent and new. Those include proliferation efforts, either brazen or clandestine, either within or outside the NPT, carried out by both State and non-State actors.

The Brazilian ambassador said that the way to strengthen the Treaty's credibility is to reaffirm the cogent and complementary nature of all commitments under that instrument. Confidence in the review process, as a guarantor of the fundamental bargain on which the Treaty is based, should not be allowed to erode.

That was why the Conference sought a balanced approach in its review of the Treaty's operation, he commented. The issue of non-proliferation should be tackled in a comprehensive manner, on a par with nuclear disarmament and the development of nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

That is a basic principle of Brazil's national policy, he affirmed. In addition to electrical power generation, Brazil's nuclear activities extend to wide-ranging applications in medicine, agriculture, industry and the environment.

Article IV of the NPT, he said, clearly recognizes the inalienable right to the development and use of nuclear energy for peaceful ends. It does not qualify, restrict or reinterpret such a right, which, incidentally, existed prior to the Treaty.

Brazil has called on the five nuclear-weapon States to "undo" the effects of the nuclear proliferation in which they have engaged through the accumulation of weapons and, hence, to strive to achieve nuclear disarmament, he said.

There is no excuse for the use or indefinite possession of nuclear weapons, or for their development or acquisition. The NPT is the main international instrument to achieving those goals.

At the same time, he welcomed the announcements regarding substantial reductions in nuclear arsenals. The Moscow Treaty was a positive step in the process of nuclear de-escalation, but the fundamental principles of verification and irreversibility should be applied to all disarmament measures.

Although the NPT does not contain provisions expressly prohibiting modernization of nuclear weapons and their delivery means, the introduction of new types of weapons or the announcement of strategic doctrines that tend to lower the threshold for the utilization of nuclear weapons runs counter to the "unequivocal commitment" to full nuclear disarmament, and bypasses the 13 practical steps towards that goal.

Sardenberg also said that the Review Conference's task is twofold: to urge non-States parties to accede to the Treaty without conditions and without delay; and to call on States parties to refrain from any action that might contravene or undermine the fulfillment of the Treaty's objectives. The international community must share the concern that peaceful nuclear programmes might be used as a cover for nuclear proliferation.

On the one hand, however, one should not ignore the successful track record of the safeguards system for non-nuclear-weapon IAEA members. On the other hand, one should not wrongfully blame the NPT for alleged loopholes that were assumed to render it ineffective in combating proliferation.

The Brazilian ambassador supports strengthened safeguards. At the same time, he says, a balance should be maintained in the IAEA's activities regarding verification, on the one hand, and the promotion of peaceful applications of nuclear energy, on the other.