

Agreeing on Non-Proliferation Agenda Is Tiny Step, Says Brazil

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Nearly halfway through a four-week conference reviewing the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), delegations meeting at United Nations Headquarters in New York have adopted an agenda which will enable them to go on with their work.

But Ambassador Sérgio Duarte of Brazil, President of the 2005 NPT Review Conference, said the adoption of an agenda after a week and a half of protracted negotiations was but a "tiny first step" and that parties to the accord still had to untangle other procedural knots before talks on the "real issues" before the meeting could move forward in earnest.

"The agenda agreed yesterday evening tries to address the concerns of everyone," Ambassador Duarte said at a press conference.

"That's what diplomacy is all about - still, it's just a first step, the next step is the organization of work and items must be allocated to the main committees." Those discussions might continue into the weekend, he added.

At the end of yesterday's meeting of the State parties, he had read a statement based on the negotiations, which said:

"It is understood that the review will be conducted in the light of the decisions and the resolution of previous Conferences, and allow for discussion of any issue raised by State Parties."

Today, Ambassador Duarte said this formulation met the concerns of delegations who had stressed that the decisions of past review conferences - particularly those of 1995 and 2000 on a nuclear weapons-free Middle East and "13 practical steps" toward disarmament - not be diminished in any way.

It had also addressed the concerns of those who believe that the Conference should be able to discuss recent developments, nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, safeguards, verification and compliance.

Considered a landmark agreement, the 35-year-old Treaty seeks to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons technology, foster the peaceful use of nuclear energy and further the goal of general and complete disarmament.

Under the pact, nations without such weapons pledge not to pursue them, in exchange for a commitment by five nuclear-weapons States - the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France and China - to negotiate toward getting rid of them.

Asked if the NPT was still valid with countries like Iran, Israel, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), India and Pakistan outside its purview, Ambassador Duarte said the accord was still significant because 188 other parties had not taken that path.

Many States had spoken about Israel during the general debate and many had also discussed the DPRK's withdrawal from the NPT, Ambassador Duarte noted. As soon as the parties agreed on a way in which they can discuss the "real issues" on the agenda, he expected more discussion along those lines.

This was a "painful and protracted process," he said, adding that the issues were known, but the Conference was tied up with procedural matters.

The nuclear "have-nots" have long been saying that the rhythm and the pace of measures undertaken by the five recognized the nuclear countries have not been satisfactory. Non-nuclear States had been pointedly asking for

movement on that issue.

"But if we don't discuss the substance of the Treaty and keep discussing the formulation of the agenda, we won't get there," the Ambassador said.

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