

NPT States Convene for PrepCom, Discuss Treaty Implementation

- [Arms Control Today](#)

May 2002

By Alex Wagner

Delegates from more than 100 countries met April 8-19 in New York to debate the implementation of the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), with the United States drawing muted criticism for policies that some believe undermine the vitality of the nonproliferation regime.

The meeting, known as a preparatory committee (PrepCom), provided the first forum since the 2000 NPT review conference for countries to address concerns over adherence to the treaty and strove to lay the groundwork for the next review conference in 2005.

The gathering was the first of its kind not to aim to produce a final document agreed to by consensus. Rather a "factual summary" from Chairman Henrik Salander of Sweden was produced, identifying the meeting's major themes without making the judgments or recommendations customarily found in final declarations.

In an interview, Salander said he was "relatively satisfied" with the meeting's outcome, noting it was "the first PrepCom in a long time with a clear and uncontested result."

A senior Western official who attended the meeting hailed the outcome as "a credible first step in the review process" and noted that not having to seek consensus language prevented delegations from "running [their] heads against a brick wall that is not going to move for at least three years."

Previous PrepComs' failure to achieve a consensus final document motivated NPT member states at the 2000 review conference to require only the last of the three PrepComs before the next conference to attempt to adopt a consensus document. In the interview, Salander remarked that "given this new, untested process, it was not realistic to expect much more than what we achieved."

Salander's summary emphasized a greater need for nuclear nonproliferation efforts in the post-September 11 world. It also reflected general agreement among member states to seek universal adherence to the NPT, to increase transparency in states' nuclear programs, and to make "credible progress" toward nuclear disarmament.

The report further described specific issues discussed at the meeting, including widespread support for the U.S.-Russian strategic reductions dialogue, negotiated controls over fissile material, concern about Iraq's and North Korea's continued noncompliance with the NPT and UN resolutions, and "strong support" for the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). However, the document also noted some states' concern over the Bush administration's decision to withdraw from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty.

Salander's report also reflected states-parties' widespread perception that the Bush administration is disinterested in multilateral arms control and questionably committed to nuclear disarmament, as required by the NPT. Despite a U.S. statement that it views "the NPT as the bedrock of the global effort to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons," delegates questioned and admonished Washington for backing away from some of the political commitments it agreed to in 2000.

NPT States Convene for PrepCom, Discuss Treaty Implementation

Published on Arms Control Association (<https://www.armscontrol.org>)

At the 2000 review conference, the United States and the other four nuclear-weapon states committed to an “unequivocal undertaking” to eliminate their nuclear weapons totally. They also agreed to 13 “practical steps” that could help them move toward that goal.

However, the Bush administration has effectively abandoned two of these steps with its decision to withdraw from the ABM Treaty and not to seek ratification of the CTBT. The Pentagon’s recently leaked nuclear posture review—which lists countries against which the United States should be prepared to use nuclear weapons and which discusses the development of new nuclear weapons—also caused delegations to question the U.S. commitment to nuclear disarmament and its negative security assurances, which it reaffirmed during the meeting. U.S. negative security assurances pledge that the United States will not use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-armed states, provided they are not allied with a nuclear-weapon state.

The United States and France further raised concerns and nearly derailed the PrepCom when they resisted devoting special time to report progress on nuclear disarmament and to discuss Middle Eastern nuclear weapons issues. Salander threatened to end the meeting a week early if the issue was not resolved, but Canada helped broker a compromise, under which broader related issues could also be raised during the specially reserved time.

The second of three preparatory committee meetings will be held April 29-May 9, 2003, in Geneva.

Source URL: <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2002-05/news/npt-states-convene-prepcom-discuss-treaty-implementation>