

CD Resumes 2000 Negotiating Session

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The 66-member UN Conference on Disarmament (CD) resumed plenary meetings May 25, only days after the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) review conference issued a call for the CD to negotiate and conclude a ban on the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons within five years. While the CD's outgoing president said there appeared to be a new window of opportunity following the NPT review conference, an agreement on a work program to start negotiations was not yet possible.

Since mid-1999, the key hurdle to negotiations within the CD, which operates by consensus, has been disagreement between China and the United States over negotiations on the prevention of an arms race in outer space. Though supporting negotiations on a fissile material cutoff, China has refused to let any CD negotiations start without a work program agreement that includes outer space. While indicating a willingness to hold informal CD discussions on outer space, Washington has singularly opposed formal outer space negotiations and has pushed for starting fissile material cutoff negotiations even without a comprehensive work program agreement.

But in a May 1 statement to the NPT review conference, all five nuclear-weapon states urged the CD to agree "as soon as possible" on a work program that includes a fissile material cutoff treaty. In effect, the United States, according to a senior U.S. official, "recognized the reality of the CD linkage" between a work program agreement and fissile material cutoff negotiations. This recognition helped win a fully agreed statement from the five nuclear-weapon states and a successful NPT review conference, explained the official. How the CD will address the outer space issue remains unresolved.

The CD's current working session will end July 7, and its final working period for the year will take place from August 7 to September 22. In both 1997 and 1999, the conference was unable to start negotiations.

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