



FACT SHEET

Conference on Disarmament

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Background

The Conference on Disarmament (CD), based in Geneva, Switzerland, was formally established in 1979 as a forum for countries to negotiate arms control and disarmament matters. It is the only forum of its kind dedicated to disarmament. The CD succeeded previous organizations dedicated to a similar agenda, including the Ten-Nation Committee on Disarmament (1960), the Eighteen-Nation Committee on Disarmament (1962-1968), the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament (1969-1978) and the Committee on Disarmament (1979–1983). Until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the CD and its predecessors were jointly chaired by the United States and Soviet Union.

The CD has a unique relationship with the United Nations (UN). A special representative to the UN Secretary-General is appointed to serve as liaison between the CD and UN, and acts as secretary general for the CD itself. Typically, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) will request the CD to conduct analysis and recommendations on specific arms control and disarmament matters. The UNGA only makes recommendations, though ultimately the CD sets its own agenda. The CD reports annually to the UNGA.

As of July 2009, there are 65 Member States in the CD. The Member States have grouped themselves in accordance with common interests, including the Western Group (25 States), the Group of 21 (33 States), the Eastern European Group (six States) and China, which often refers to itself as the Group of One. The CD presidency consists of six member state representatives (the P6). For 2009, the P6 include Vietnam, Zimbabwe, Algeria, Argentina, Australia, and Austria.

The CD convenes three times each year, and holds at least one public plenary per week during those times. The body, which in the past has negotiated international treaties through subject-focused ad hoc committees, operates by consensus and has successfully negotiated, among others, the Biological Weapons Convention, the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. A Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty is currently considered “ripe for negotiation” and has been on the CD’s proposed program of work for the past several years, along with nuclear disarmament, negative security assurances—official guarantees by nuclear weapon states assuring “non-use” of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states—and the prevention of an arms race in outer space (PAROS).

A treaty on PAROS has been considered by the CD, with discussions handled through an ad hoc committee first established in 1985 (the next page covers the PAROS ad hoc committee activities by year). As a result of disagreements among the CD Member States, the ad hoc committee on PAROS has not convened since 1994. Furthermore, while regular statements are made and discussions continue informally on a variety of matters, including PAROS, the CD has not adopted a program of work since 1996.

CD responsibilities¹

The CD adopted a permanent agenda for the conduct of its meetings, originally referred to as the “Decalogue”, but this has since been modified in subtle ways as necessary (for example, the inclusion of space weapons in 1985):

- ◆ Weapons of mass destruction (nuclear, biological, chemical and others so classified);
- ◆ Conventional weapons;
- ◆ Reduction of military budgets;
- ◆ Reduction of armed forces;
- ◆ Disarmament and development;
- ◆ Disarmament and international security;
- ◆ Collateral measures, confidence building measures, effective verification methods in relation to appropriate disarmament measures; and
- ◆ Comprehensive program of disarmament leading to general and complete disarmament under effective international control.



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The CD PAROS ad hoc committee

The following is adapted from the *Arms Control Reporter*, produced by the Institute for Defense and Disarmament Studies, and from the website of Reaching Critical Will.²

- ◆ **1985**—The CD established an ad hoc committee to facilitate negotiations on PAROS.
- ◆ **1986**—Reestablished PAROS ad hoc committee. Little progress was made.
- ◆ **1987**—Reestablished PAROS ad hoc committee. Little progress was made.
- ◆ **1988**—Reestablished PAROS ad hoc committee. Met 17 times. Argentina called on space powers to declare they had not deployed weapons in outer space; Bulgaria introduced the idea that a ban on anti-satellite weapons is necessary.
- ◆ **1989**—Reestablished PAROS ad hoc committee. Group of 21 attempted to begin negotiations on PAROS treaty, singled out Western Group as impediment to such a treaty (specifically the U.S., which resisted a treaty to ban weapons in space).
- ◆ **1990**—Reestablished PAROS ad hoc committee. The United States declared it “has not identified any practical outer space arms control measures that can be dealt with in a multilateral environment.” Little progress was made.
- ◆ **1991**—Reestablished PAROS ad hoc committee. Met 17 times and received 14 papers. One Western delegation pointed out that distinction between military and civil space missions is often impossible, and that in many cases a ban on “destabilizing” military activities could significantly impact space activities generally. The delegation also claimed that a comprehensive ASAT prohibition would be difficult to implement because of the “dual-use” nature of ASAT technologies.
- ◆ **1992**—Reestablished PAROS ad hoc committee. Little progress was made, but a suggestion for the 1993 agenda was advanced to consider: Issues of prevention of an arms race in outer space, existing agreements related to outer space, and existing and future proposals for preventing an arms race in outer space.
- ◆ **1993**—PAROS ad hoc committee not reestablished.
- ◆ **1994**—Reestablished PAROS ad hoc committee. Some lament the lack of a formal mandate for negotiations, which France, Australia and the U.S. do not support. Western delegations argued that end of the Cold War meant that no space arms race existed, and that current international laws provided a sufficient system for ensuring the peaceful uses of outer space.
- ◆ **1995-2001**—PAROS ad hoc committee not reestablished.
- ◆ **2002**—PAROS ad hoc committee not reestablished. Russia and China submitted working paper CD/1679, entitled “Possible Elements for a Future International Legal Agreement on the Prevention of the Deployment of Weapons in Outer Space, the Threat or Use of Force Against Outer Space Objects.”
- ◆ **2003**—PAROS ad hoc committee not reestablished.
- ◆ **2004**—PAROS ad hoc committee not reestablished. China called for an international consensus on a legally-binding agreement to prevent a space arms race.
- ◆ **2005**—PAROS ad hoc committee not reestablished. On 30 June, 21 states delivered statements on PAROS during a focused plenary meeting.
- ◆ **2006**—CD focused on structured PAROS discussion. More than 20 delegations made statements and eight papers introduced.
- ◆ **2007**—PAROS ad hoc committee not reestablished. Canada introduced UNIDIR’s Report on its April conference on Space Security, entitled “Celebrating the Space Age: 50 Years of Space Technology, 40 Years of the Outer Space Treaty.” Russia and China submitted an updated compilation of comments and suggestions to their working paper CD/1679.
- ◆ **2008**—PAROS ad hoc committee not reestablished. Syria referred to UNGA Resolution 62/20, which recommends the establishment of a PAROS ad hoc committee in the CD in 2008. Russia and China introduce a draft treaty on the “Prevention of the Deployment of Weapons in Outer Space, the Threat or Use of Force Against Outer Space Objects.”
- ◆ **2009**—During PAROS informal discussions in early 2009, Canada spoke to its working paper on “The Merits of Certain Draft Transparency and Confidence-Building Measures and Treaty Proposals for Space Security” which it formally tabled on March 26, 2009. “The paper argues that the CD should consider security guarantees, such as a declaration of legal principles, a code of conduct, or a treaty, that would: (a) ban the placement of weapons in space, (b) prohibit the test or use of weapons on satellites so as to damage or destroy them, and (c) prohibit the test or use of satellites themselves as weapons .”

Footnotes

1. Information derived from the United Nations Office at Geneva website on the Conference on Disarmament ([http://www.unog.ch/80256EE600585943/\(httpPages\)/2D415EE45C5FAE07C12571800055232B?OpenDocument](http://www.unog.ch/80256EE600585943/(httpPages)/2D415EE45C5FAE07C12571800055232B?OpenDocument))
2. Information derived from the *Arms Control Reporter: A Chronicle of Treaties, Negotiations, Proposals, Weapons, and Policy*, Volume 25: 2006, produced by the Institute for Defense & Disarmament Studies (www.armscontrolreporter.org) and from the website of Reaching Critical Will (www.reachingcriticalwill.org).
3. Statement by Canada in the CD On Tabling of Canada’s Working Paper concerning TCBMs for Space Security, Ambassador Marius Grinius, March 26, 2009.