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Oral History Interview with Abdul Minty

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Summary:

Advisor to South Africa's Foreign Minister Alfred Nzo and member of the South African delegation to the 1995 review conference.

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Abdul Minty

South Africa

Oral history interview conducted by Michal Onderco by phone on 12 June 2017

Michal Onderco:

I would like to start by having a very general question. Could you discuss a little bit what was your personal position within the delegation that went to the Conference and within the Foreign Ministry at the time?

Abdul Minty:

Well, I have previously had led our delegation to the NPT, and other conferences. In '95, I wasn't working for the government but the Foreign Minister asked me to join the delegation. So, in '95, I was part of an infusion when we had the NPT Extension Committee and our proposal for the extension was adopted. And then after that, after I joined the Foreign Ministry later in '95, then every meeting except the last one in 2015, I was the leader of the South African delegation. The 2015 meeting, I joined it as a participant because I was the Ambassador in Geneva. So, on that basis, I joined that meeting in New York. So, that's just been my role as far as the South African government.

Michal Onderco:

When it comes to the Review and Extension Conference in 1995, you said that you weren't working before in the Foreign Ministry but you had joined the delegation upon the invitation of the Foreign Minister.

Abdul Minty:

No. Before that, before I joined, I was also asked to come to Pretoria, because I was based in Norway at the time ...

Michal Onderco:

[affirmative]

Abdul Minty:

... and I was asked to come to Pretoria for consultations to prepare for the 1995 NPT...

Michal Onderco:

And when was that?

Abdul Minty:

That was before the actual meeting.

Michal Onderco:

Okay, but ...

Abdul Minty:

...several weeks before.

Michal Onderco:

Okay. Was that the famous meeting at the Union House? At the Diplomatic House?

Sorry.

Abdul Minty:
Which famous meeting?

Michal Onderco:
Well, there are records of a meeting at the Diplomatic House that was chaired by Thabo Mbeki that prepared the policy for the Conference.

Abdul Minty:
Yeah, I've not seen those records myself but I did participate in some meetings there as well.

Michal Onderco:
South African position at the last Preparatory Committee was that there should be only a temporary extension. There should be only a 25-year extension, a rolling one.

Abdul Minty:
When was this position?

Michal Onderco:
Well, this was at the last Preparatory Committee in December 1994 [ed: this meeting was actually in January 1995].

Abdul Minty:
Well, I'm not aware that there was any position to work out in December 1994.

Michal Onderco:
Okay. So, you're not aware of it?

Abdul Minty:
No. There may have been some official who mentioned that, you know?

Michal Onderco:
Yeah.

Abdul Minty:
But I'm not aware of a governmental position because from '94 I was in regular contact with

Michal Onderco:
[affirmative]

Abdul Minty:
the South African Foreign Minister. I know this because I also attended with the meeting of the IAEA General Conference.

Michal Onderco:
Yeah.

Abdul Minty:

So, I was in touch with the government over all the subject matters. So, I would have been aware if there was a specific position taken. Unless they were the views of some officials.

Michal Onderco:

Okay. So, can you tell me a little more about how the position for the 1995 Review Conference came about?

Abdul Minty:

Well, there were some considerations which people did not, at the time, believe us very strongly. The first problem or issue was that the Non-Aligned Movement had decided before the 1995 Review Conference that we should not have an extension that is permanent, indefinite.

We should have a time-bound extension. We had consulted very, very widely - by "we" I do mean the South African government - consulted very, very widely and came to the conclusion that on several counts we should in fact go for an indefinite extension, provided that because some other position was accepted by the Review Conference. And that, as you know, later were the Principles and then so on.

Michal Onderco:

Yes.

Abdul Minty:

We also insisted that the Middle East -

Michal Onderco:

[affirmative]

Abdul Minty:

- was the central issue and that should be a different [unintelligible]. So, those were the things we were fighting for.

Michal Onderco:

And -

Abdul Minty:

And the other consideration is that, of course, is not that well understood by many was a principle we felt that if you left open the possibility of the NPT not being permanently extended, it would mean that some governments could leave open the possibility of embarking on a nuclear weapons program after the adoption of whatever period we have. Because they may wait for the period to expire and then they would reserve the right to more fuel, producing nuclear weapons.

So, we felt that to seal off that possibility and to keep nuclear weapons - although we were not happy with it - with the limited number that we had, it would be safer than the risk of extending it for a certain time period. And if at the end of that time period some governments decided to embark on nuclear weapons because of it, that would make for a more dangerous world. So, that was a rather important consideration.

The other one, which was even less appreciated by many - they didn't understand it - is that we had in Africa before banned nuclear tests - Nigeria was a focus of that in

earlier years - and we did not want to create the possibility for further nuclear weapons test to take place in Africa.

Michal Onderco:
[affirmative]

Abdul Minty:

So, we wanted to, in a way, seal off Africa and the prospect of increasing nuclear weapons by also working for the African nuclear-weapon-free zone. Now, I had worked on that since the early 1960s onward to try and get an African nuclear-weapon-free zone. Through the OAU we adopted a number of resolutions collectively for the continent of Africa to shield Africa from further nuclear tests, and to declare that Africa would become a nuclear- weapon-free zone.

Now, we couldn't, of course, establish that because South Africa had nuclear weapons, and so it was only after 1996 when we had a conference, and this conference was in Cairo, and we finally embarked on creating an African nuclear-weapon-free zone. And once it was established, a few years later I was asked to be the first chairman of that African nuclear-weapon-free zone, which I served for the statutory period of three years.

So, we also wanted to seal off Africa from any future nuclear weapons testing, and also any development of nuclear weapons by any other country.

Michal Onderco:

You started by talking about many consultations that you had and, of course, at the time - it was shortly after the post-apartheid transition - and there was a very wide also consultation with the United States, and there was also a bilateral commission and so on and so forth. Was there ever a discussion between the United States and South Africa on the extension of the NPT?

Abdul Minty:

There may have been. But, you see, we have to make a difference between discussions by political leaders and discussions by officials.

Michal Onderco:
Okay.

Abdul Minty:

So, officials were obviously conducting discussions with the United States and many other countries, even before our freedom.

Michal Onderco:
Yes.

Abdul Minty:

But after we became free, I was consulting regularly with the South African Ministers concerned about dealing with this issue because I had worked on the subject since the 1960s, and they knew it. So, they knew of my reputation and what I had done, and so they consulted me regularly on the question of South Africa's policy on nuclear weapons.

Michal Onderco:

Before I go on, you mentioned before that you came to work for the South African

Ministry of Foreign Affairs only after 1995 [Conference], when you became the Ambassador.

Abdul Minty:

Yes, I was appointed in August of '95.

Michal Onderco:

In August? So, how was your relation with the diplomats at the Foreign Ministry before that?

Abdul Minty:

I didn't know them that well. They were present in a few meetings, but I did not know them intimately. So, I dealt with the political position.

Michal Onderco:

And how was the cooperation with them?

Abdul Minty:

At what point?

Michal Onderco:

Well, in 1995, prior to the conference.

Abdul Minty:

No, when I took over, remember that this was also the responsibility of the Multilateral Branch of the Department of Foreign Affairs. We had a Multilateral Branch, an African Branch, and so on. And the Multilateral Branch dealt with nuclear issues. So, I became the person in charge of the Multilateral Branch in August '95.

Michal Onderco:

Okay. So, you didn't deal with the nuclear diplomats, like Jean DuPreez and Peter Goosen and others?

Abdul Minty:

No, I didn't deal with them. They worked for me.

Michal Onderco:

Okay

Abdul Minty:

They were my junior officials in the Department of Foreign Affairs, but also some of them who were on missions and so on, who were sending reports, but it was only in August '95 -

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Abdul Minty:

- that I got involved as an official of the Department of Foreign Affairs

Michal Onderco:

And was there also interest in the matters of non-proliferation from the highest levels of political leadership in South Africa?

Abdul Minty:

Yes, there was, and I was discussing it with them even before we changed to become free.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Abdul Minty:

So, it would be since 1990 onward, once we saw that we were likely have freedom. And even before that, I was in exile and some of them were in exile. We discussed these nuclear matters regularly, and we also developed probably, in the Non-Aligned Movement in the OAU and elsewhere, where liberation movements were recognized as liberation movements, the African Liberation Movement, but that's not all. And since I was the Secretary of the British Anti-Apartheid Movement. And as the Secretary of the British Anti-Apartheid Movement, I took part in many disarmament talks. And we also produced a lot of information on South Africa's own nuclear weapon capability and its ambitions to the develop nuclear weapons.

Michal Onderco:

Yes.

Abdul Minty:

So, long before 1990, I was involved in these matters at the diplomatic and political level.

Michal Onderco:

You mentioned already many of South Africa's friends in the Non-Aligned Movement, and you also mentioned before that the Non-Aligned Movement was not really interested in extending NPT indefinitely. How did the South African position on the indefinite extension go with the rest of the Non-Aligned Movement?

Abdul Minty:

Well, I wouldn't put it that it was our position on the indefinite extension.

Michal Onderco:

Oh.

Abdul Minty:

Because we took part in the Non-Aligned meeting.

Michal Onderco:

Yes.

Abdul Minty:

So, what happened in New York, and just before that, with some of the leaders of non-aligned countries, we discussed our proposal. A few of them did not like it very much. Others were very interested.

Michal Onderco:

[affirmative]

Abdul Minty:

But remember, we didn't simply take this position that we must have an indefinite extension. We also brought in different procedures for the NPT review meeting itself, for all the reviews that took place, you know, before the actual NPT review meeting, and so on. And those proposals also aimed at trying to get regular discussions on disarmament issues and to make progress. Unfortunately, the parties of the NPT and, you see, the major powers and the nuclear-weapon states did not go along with the expectations of the NPT decision. Because if you look at the NPT decision itself, then we created a number of possibilities for progress to be made at the annual meetings in between the NPT review meetings.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah. So, since you started talking about the principles and objectives and about the strengthened review process, how did the ideas for these two instruments come about? How were these two instruments born?

Abdul Minty:

So, they were born out of our own understanding of what we thought was necessary.

Michal Onderco:

[affirmative]

Abdul Minty:

And what we thought we would need also to make progress on disarmament. So, if we are to make progress with a nuclear-weapon state, to move towards that, then we would need to have a review process where each review meeting would build on a building block created by the previous one.

Michal Onderco:

Yes.

Abdul Minty:

And then, unfortunately, when we tried to work on that, we found that the major powers were really not interested in making that kind of progress.

It was a big disappointment by and on our part. It was also an expectation that they did not do that.

Michal Onderco:

But that was only after 1995?

Abdul Minty:

Yes. It was after '95.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah. Yeah.

Abdul Minty:

Because '95 was a meeting.

Michal Onderco:

Yes.

Abdul Minty:

But before '95, we thought that a procedure that is outlined and we should understand from the positions taken that they would be important steps to move forward. We wanted to obviously work out diplomatic procedures for that, and then addition to that, everyone should or must understand the importance of the Middle East issue. So, to make the Middle Eastern nuclear weapons free zone, and later it became all weapons of mass destruction be known, we had to make progress on that. And that became a very important part of our strategy for the '95 meeting; and indeed, in '95 we had a resolution adopted for the first time, putting forward that position.

So, they built various decisions of '95 were interlinked.

Michal Onderco:

And the decision to come up with something that later became the principles and objectives was that born long before the conference, or was that something that you came up with only at the conference?

Abdul Minty:

No, no. We came up before the conference because we were discussing before that with our political leadership and others as to what we should do.

Michal Onderco:

[affirmative]

Abdul Minty:

So, it was still done in South Africa under the apartheid leaders that developed nuclear weapons and they decided to give it up. For us, which is the new government, it was absolutely imperative that we had a constructive approach to the question of nuclear weapons in order to reduce their use obviously, but also the number of countries that possess it. So, we wanted to encourage the world and create an atmosphere whereby we could encourage others also not to develop their nuclear weapons more than what they have and for the new ones, not to develop them at all.

So that would mean that they would have to have confidence in international security structure; and therefore, the proposals that we put forward at the NPT review meeting were actually intended to create that atmosphere for all.

Michal Onderco:

Yes.

Abdul Minty:

A more peaceful world for all; even those who have nuclear weapons, they would also move towards a more peaceful world. And they had the assurance of the indefinite extension that no one else was developing nuclear weapons. So, we felt that in return they should obviously be able to work harder on disarmament issues.

Michal Onderco:

In the - already during the conference, NAM was holding a meeting in Bandung - and one of the issues -

Abdul Minty:

Yes. The anniversary of Bandung.

Michal Onderco:

Yes.

Abdul Minty:

Yeah, and the Non-Aligned founding. Yes, they had a meeting and our ambassador in New York attended that meeting and kept in touch with me regularly because I was sent to New York to join the delegation. So, the NPT meeting took place at the same time as that Non-Aligned in Bandung.

Michal Onderco:

And that conference was interesting because South Africa, at the time, basically was the only one together with Benin that was sort of openly arguing in favor indefinite extension...

Abdul Minty:

Because, I mentioned to you, we had to take a position that was not agreed by the whole non-aligned .

Michal Onderco:

Sorry?

Abdul Minty:

No, as I told you, we had to take a position.

Michal Onderco:

Yes.

Abdul Minty:

Because of how we looked at the issue, we chose not to merely agree on the rest of the non-aligned

Michal Onderco:

But there, you know, in the Non-Aligned Movement there are countries who historically sort of claim certain authority on the nuclear issues, such as Indonesia and others. How did they sort of position, or how did they view the arguments that were put forward by South Africa?

Abdul Minty:

I think it was difficult at the time of Bandung, and just before the NPT meeting began, to get many countries to change their position. But we thought that if we could get a Principles and Objectives agreed and the Middle East resolution and so on, we would have a comprehensive approach for the future of how we would deal with the issues of nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament.

Michal Onderco:

Yes.

Abdul Minty:

And therefore, when these were put forward, obviously, you must also recognize that

countries would not just accept the position because it was stated by someone, no matter how sensible it looks.

You would have to have a buyer buy-in on some of the main players. And so, it was only at the conference that we began to get the buy-in from others, and when the non-aligned countries, important nonaligned countries - Malaysia, I think, was chairing the non-aligned at the time - when they saw that there was a buy-in into what we had proposed and that it was probably the best way forward, they all supported the position that South Africa had initially put forward. And so, at the meeting itself we didn't have any serious difficulties in getting the position agreed [spelled phonetically].

Michal Onderco:

At the conference, the position that South Africa advocated for - that is, the indefinite extension - was formally submitted in the form of resolution by Canada. Was there any sort of cooperation between South Africa and Canada on this issue?

Abdul Minty:

No, your reading of it is not absolutely correct.

Michal Onderco:

Okay.

Abdul Minty:

The proposal was put forward by the South African Foreign Minister in his opening statement on the first day of the conference. So, that's where the proposal was made. Many people were surprised by that proposal, and we had meetings with leaders of other governments about it, including the Vice President of the United States and many others, and the leaders of the British delegation, and many discussed it with us. So, we were engaged in rather intensive talks, you know?

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Abdul Minty:

So that we could propose. Now, later, I know Mexico also was thinking of a similar proposal or another proposal or so they told us. But they didn't move as early as we did. Well, we thought that the only honest thing to do, and to do it openly, is not just to discuss - how can I put it? In special meetings or side meetings and so on - but on the opening day of the conference put forth the proposal. And that is what we did, and if anyone looks at the speech of Alfred Nzo they will find it there. It was very clear. We didn't change many things after that. The main basis of the extension was laid out in that statement. Of course, initially some thought it wasn't realistic. Others thought it was an excellent solution to the issue and so on.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Abdul Minty:

The people had different reactions. And so, we were engaged in a whole series of bilateral discussions after that.

Michal Onderco:

So, but the resolution that, in the end, was proposed and that was accepted, was

sponsored by, was tabled originally by Canada, and Canada was the country that was collecting the signatures for it?

Abdul Minty:

Yeah, because diplomatically that is what happens now.

Michal Onderco:

Okay.

Abdul Minty:

Canada is a country that wished to get a broad front and to get other countries to join in with it, but long before that, our proposal was discussed both in the non-aligned and in other regional groups. And I even went to address [unintelligible] to put forward for them to discuss it with them. We had interaction not only with bilateral individual governments but also with particular groups.

Michal Onderco:

So, how did the cooperation with Canada go on that resolution?

Abdul Minty:

Oh, it was very good. And we cooperated also with the Russian Federation, we cooperated with the United States, we cooperated with France. We cooperated with China. We cooperated not only with the main players but all the parties of the NPT.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Abdul Minty:

We didn't work in a way to say that we would only play with the big powers or the big player. We worked in a universal way where every country was equal, and that's why we were engaged in a whole lot of meetings. I don't think that we ever refused a meeting or any request from any member of the NPT.

Michal Onderco:

How do you remember the negotiations in the small group of the Friends of President? Who was leading those negotiations from the South African part?

Abdul Minty:

Well, I was part of it; I took part in it and some of the officials were involved in it. Because my role was advisor, I was not employed formally by the government.

Michal Onderco:

Yes.

Abdul Minty:

But I was under the direct authority of the Foreign Minister and Deputy-President and the President. I reported to them about development and there we needed something to commence to talk also to some of the parties who were in New York. They did that, and that is how, of course, normal diplomacy was. But this was one of our biggest diplomatic initiative after we had become free.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Abdul Minty:

And it was also politically and vitally important for us to, if you wish, put forward a paradigm that would offer hope for the future. The problem was hope for the future, not indefinite extension.

Michal Onderco:

So ...

Abdul Minty:

And that hope will aim to reduce the role of nuclear weapons and hopefully eventually towards indefinite extension.

Michal Onderco:

So how did you go about building that diplomatic momentum? Because in the conference, where the decision is made by consensus, you need to sort of be able to stove off the opposition. Who were the most important countries that you thought the most important to be persuaded?

Abdul Minty:

Well, we managed to get a buy-in from nuclear-weapon states - some of them had serious concerns - so, on that basis, we had a number of discussions and also encouraged them to have discussions with each other in order to build a consensus. For us, very important countries were also the non-aligned countries, you know?

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Abdul Minty:

Each of them is very important and they're all players that had to go out for many years, very important players. Indonesia, as you mentioned, was a main country in the Non-Aligned Movement. They were taking the lead on the subject for a few years. And so, there were a number of key countries from different regions. Mexico was very important, and Mexico [unintelligible] in the NPT project. They play a very important role. So, we were in regular contact with them. We had lunches or meetings with them, sometimes collective ones, we arranged meetings in individual countries or with sets of countries.

Michal Onderco:

Some of the observers mentioned that, in the case of Mexico and the leader of the delegation, Ambassador Marin Bosch that the country - that he was sort of - in a way silenced through the intervention of the United States. Do you share that observation?

Abdul Minty:

No, I did not see anything of that significance. Because he and I had several meetings. We even had a meeting with our delegation and their delegation to uphold the tactics and strategies for our folks, and Mexico agreed with us quite early on. So, soon after we made a proposal - I can't remember exactly but I think it was in some hours we had some discussions about amongst each of us - but within a week we had rather detailed discussions with their delegation and then ours. So, Mexico was a rather important partner in the evolution of the outcome.

Michal Onderco:

In the negotiations in the Friends of President, in the small group -

Abdul Minty:

Yes. I was on it from the beginning.

Michal Onderco:

- which were the most difficult points of contention?

Abdul Minty:

You know, it would be difficult to judge in that way, as to which are the most difficult points of contention. Now, first of all, the Middle East issue is obviously a very difficult political issue -

Michal Onderco:

Yes.

Abdul Minty:

- in all countries, particularly the United States, but also other countries. So, we had to take each issue on its own merit, see where the general membership stands. And in addition - the main players, where they stand on it. And then hopefully, move toward the consensus behind the modifying language of talking to them to persuade them about how the current language at the time is the most important part.

So, as you may know, at the NPT there are also, you know, a lot of work is done outside of those meetings.

Michal Onderco:

Yes.

Abdul Minty:

There are regular lunches - almost every day we were going to luncheons - and our delegation was split up in order to go to the luncheons. And of course, the ones that were more important I used to go to, and others would go to other lunches and report back to me and we used to coordinate, you know, how to work. Now, our Foreign Minister also was not there for long because of the Bandung meeting.

Michal Onderco:

Yes.

Abdul Minty:

So, we didn't have political leadership of that length. But I would still consult with them every day by telephone and elsewhere, and report on what was happening, and they would come back. And when necessary, they would also speak to their counterparts in other countries where we needed them to try and persuade countries or explain to them, you know, why we were taking such a position.

Michal Onderco:

Yes.

Abdul Minty:

But we were working as a collective. I mean, I attended, I think, literally every

non-aligned meeting at this stage in New York. And they were very regular, sometimes two or three a week, you know? To clarify certain issues.

Michal Onderco:
Yeah.

Abdul Minty:
So, in that meeting, it is something in that meeting you don't see - in that meeting, it's is a very interesting one. It's set up by the President, that group?

Michal Onderco:
Yes.

Abdul Minty:
It's decided by the President as to, you know, as to who will attend and then we would have to then elect a chairperson.

Michal Onderco:
Yeah.

Abdul Minty:
And that chairperson's ability to command a consensus and respect among different members is very important. And so, we work in that context in that situation. At times, when we were discussing things, if a country was what you call "difficult," it wasn't so much a country being difficult. It was a question about going paragraph by paragraph with the document we have. And then if some country disagrees with a certain paragraph as it stands. And we would discuss it with them and if they have valid reasons, we would amend it without losing the important part of that. And then sometimes it happens that you would negotiate and in the formal meeting - in one case, one important country would say, "No, we don't agree" - and if they have any important counterarguments, I think they should have a say [it] instead of simply saying, "No, no, no."

Michal Onderco:
Yeah.

Abdul Minty:
And you can't make much progress because the outcome has to be accepted by everyone. So then, in the coffee breaks from the office.

Michal Onderco:
[laughs]

Abdul Minty:
I ran into one of them and said, "Look, you're opposing on this when I don't think you understood it probably. This is really what it means. Are you really against it?" and I was told, "No, it isn't. So, can we look at the wording again? And see if we can use another third word?"

Michal Onderco:
Yeah.

Abdul Minty:

Not the word that was there in the one you wanted. And then we can move forward. Yeah, I'm quite open to do that.

Michal Onderco:

And -

Abdul Minty:

And so, we would put it forward. South Africa played quite an important role in that because we had just come out into freedom and many countries respected us a great deal. And so, we had to act in a responsible manner to use that reputation as well. And to make real progress which would be of a more permanent nature, not just to fix something for that country. So, we stuck to our principles because we have rather important principles that we wanted to be adopted so that we don't end up just with any indefinite extension and everybody says, "What a great conference it was." We wanted to make sure that the decision became an important part of a timetable, and a principled position to create hope, and one in which everybody took part, all members of the NPT.

Michal Onderco:

How was your cooperation with the P5 countries? Because a lot of the hope that you have been just talking about, of course, relates directly to them. How was your interaction before and during the conference with the P5?

Abdul Minty:

No, we didn't meet with them collectively

Michal Onderco:

[affirmative]

Abdul Minty:

A few times ,we met with them separately.

Michal Onderco:

Okay.

Abdul Minty:

So, we had special relations with some of them. The United States, soon after the statement by our Foreign Minister to the full conference, I went to a lunch with the Vice President and a few other diplomats - they were invited. And then a couple of days after that, they said they would be prepared to support our approach, and Susan Burk, who was one of the negotiators that was appointed by the U.S., to liaise with me and to let people in Washington know whatever I said at any point, so we could get a quick response. We had relations like that built up with several countries and that allowed the flexibility for us.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Abdul Minty:

We pitched ideas. We discussed ideas to move forward to persuade them where they had difficulty, and impress upon them the importance of the subject matter. And as I say, these people started taking matters because they know the difficulties. But the decision on the Middle East was very, very important. It hadn't happened before, and yet is an issue that has been facing the United Nations for a long time. So, that was a

major step forward to get the consensus from them.

Michal Onderco:

How do you see the -

Abdul Minty:

[unintelligible]

Michal Onderco:

- yeah, go ahead.

Abdul Minty:

No, I said and then there were other issues related directly to the NPT extension itself. Such are the review meetings, what type of issues should be discussed, and then we should prepare for it. How the chair should be elected, from different regions, and things like that. So, those always took detailed attention and time, and a lot of time consulting. Sometimes I think we started at about eight o'clock with a consultation, the meetings would start at nine, and before that there would be other meetings, like that with the non-aligned, and so on that you had to attend. And then lunchtime; usually at lunchtime, there was a lunch. And there was often dinner as well.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Abdul Minty:

So, we were kept quite busy. But what I'm trying to convey is that all the discussions did not take place in a formal setting.

Michal Onderco:

Yes.

Abdul Minty:

So, it was not only that a special group, that was set up by the President, is the key.

Michal Onderco:

Yes.

Abdul Minty:

Because that is where, ultimately, decisions are made. And the membership of that group, and the manner in which we work there, was understood by us - certainly by me and I think by the others - that if you got language through there, and that should be language that held the possibility of being supported by the entire conference. So, a country A, B, or C, who would be there would need to know and understand that it's not only their own positions to which we have to create consensus, but we have to create consensus for the whole conference. So that when we put the final document to the pen, nobody would object to it. So, that's a very big responsibility to take, and for that, that group worked extremely well.

Michal Onderco:

Did you see -

Abdul Minty:

And of course, Ambassador Dhanapala played a very important role.

Michal Onderco:

I will come to that in a second, but before I come to Ambassador Dhanapala, I want to ask if you saw many differences among the P5 countries and what they wanted to achieve at the conference?

Abdul Minty:

There were differences but you know, the point to keep in mind is to keep your focus, your own focus.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Abdul Minty:

So then, look at the difference. Now, some of the differences are one country responding to another country's proposal, and I don't want to say more but that is what the result is.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Abdul Minty:

So, they are responding to something another one says. But then we try and find the middle ground, or try and find what is sensible for all. But in some cases, it's not so much the middle ground but persuading that country that is going a bit too far with a proposal, that they're probably being unrealistic, may not go on with support of everyone -

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Abdul Minty:

- and that there is another way to deal with it. So, most of that engagement is also to do with setting the moods, building the confidence, and using the language. Because words matter. And if you get five words put forward for, you know, five half sentences, and you're able to come with something else than commands, you know, more support, then you can find a way out. Now, we had worked a lot in different contexts internationally with the IAEA, and I've been lobbying the IAEA for - I don't know, 20 years - to exclude South Africa from the IAEA.

Michal Onderco:

Yes.

Abdul Minty:

I went to Geneva for about ten years, every year, to lobby. And in '77, I think, we agreed to get South Africa out of the board of the IAEA. It's was just a big battle. But what I had to convey is that in those forums we were also active and lobbyists for the antiapartheid movement, and so we acted with all the government there, so we understood the international climate. We had a lot of experience with that international climate. We introduced through the British Anti-Apartheid Movement numerous resolutions on disarmament and so on, and many of these we discussed with the relevant embassies and others in London and elsewhere, and we also - same with the Commonwealth - I attended certainly - no, I attended every Commonwealth

conference except two between 1960 and '94.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Abdul Minty:

So, that gave us a lot of experience knowing positions of governments. And many governments would, you know, take a position, but if you knew the diplomats and you know what they're really meaning, sometimes the governments at the beginning use words to establish a posture. And you know full well that that's not their final position.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Abdul Minty:

So, you would have to understand yourself that, by what they are saying, is that the most important thing to them or are they saying that to cover something else?

Michal Onderco:

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Abdul Minty:

And if you identify what it is that they are concerned about, then you may be able to deal with that real issue of concern, which no one has spoken about, but by introducing language that could be acceptable to all.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Abdul Minty:

And that way, you overcome a hurdle. So, we had a lot of experience, although we were new in that free country in diplomatic work, in political work, which mobilized virtually the entire world in the anti-apartheid struggle, in different ways.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Abdul Minty:

Although many, of course, continued to support the apartheid regime in different ways, too. But so, we had a lot of experience to work on this and we also kept our focus and our attention - our eye on the ball - because we wanted to have the result that we were working for. That was the most important thing.

And of course, there were compromises; I mean, everyone had to make some compromises. On some issues, we would reach - let's say in a meeting, we'd find that four governments are taking a position that is different for the resolution. We would have to either talk to all of them, talk to those who were also their colleagues, and then work out what kind of wording could bring all of them together. And then we would have to test it. And the ability to do that also depends on them trusting you, you know? And then you are able to put forward language and test, and we did not - how can I say? We're not a big power.

Michal Onderco:
Yeah.

Abdul Minty:

And we were not playing games with the issues, you know? We were open, transparent, and clear. This is what we think we would like, this is what we think the international community would like, this is what we think we should work on together. And if some opposed it for various national interest or regional matters we said, "If you do this, you will damage the following, and are you sure you want to damage that?" Now, those things never find their way in the plenary discussions. They never find their way in the language that is discussed, you know? Except in that confidential manner.

So, sometimes you do it in the small meetings that you set up, sometimes you'll cover it in a particular lunch. Sometimes you wouldn't even expect to do it and yet, when you go to a lunch or a dinner and issues come up and you make some proposal, you'll find you may not even expect that it'll be supported. And then, what will happen, they come the day after and say, "You know, that thing that you said? We think we can go along with it." And then you have to work with the others to see if they would be prepared to accept it, and that language may not be the final one, but then you work together to finalize it.

Michal Onderco:

When did you start believing that the indefinite extension is going to happen?

Abdul Minty:

No, I'll put it a little different. You see, we were so committed to this indefinite extension for the other reasons I've given.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Abdul Minty:

And we were putting in some insurance policies into it, some ways that would protect the negative side of it. We had no guarantee because, as I said, we opposed strong arming or anything like that to act like big power.

You can't do work like that. So, we did that. But even when we were all alone, we pursued it with the same enthusiasm as we did at the time when majority supported us. So, we fought at every point. We were convinced about the correctness of the policy. So, we kept to that. And we didn't know it would succeed until the final day of the conference, because anyone could get up and say, "I don't agree with it." You know, consensus [would be] broken.

Michal Onderco:

But the Canadian resolution had more than half of the members signed up on it.

Abdul Minty:

Yes, but you only need one to disagree. So, I'm not saying that confidence didn't build, you know -

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Abdul Minty:

- week after week. I'm not saying that. So, I don't want to give that impression, that things are so uncertain. What it was is that on Day 1 there wasn't that much support.

Michal Onderco:

And -

Abdul Minty:

But Day two, Day three, Day four, five, six, seven. By the weekend different groups had certain countries who took a lead, and said, "Oh, we think we are going to support it." Others would come and say their capitals are not happy. And the basic concern of the non-nuclear-weapon states was if we give them this indefinite extension, then the nuclear-weapon states will not do anything to reduce their arsenals in the future. And that obviously was a central issue.

Michal Onderco:

If I may come back - you said, okay, so all we need is one. But there was also - was there ever a consideration that the extension could be pushed through with the use of voting?

Abdul Minty:

No, because no conference had that.

In the disarmament sector, in the U.N., too, and when have the sessions in October at the U.N. and so on, there are votes taken place in the committee and so on. But in the bigger meetings, the approach is all to try and clear consensus. Because you need to try and get everybody to be a party to whatever decision you've taken, and that's why many of the important disarmament discussions are based on consensus.

Michal Onderco:

The Treaty provisions say that there needs to be half of the signatories that decide about whether there is going to be an extension or not.

Abdul Minty:

Yes, but you had more than half.

Michal Onderco:

Yes.

Abdul Minty:

So, the issue didn't arise; but politically, what are you going to do with half? And it depends which half.

Then you will get a treaty that's not worth much at the end, and many U.N. resolutions have taken place like that on many issues. So, it is important, you know? To try as much as possible for consensus because we put an importance not only on the nuclear-weapon states but on those countries that have signed the NPT who are very small or very minor, but that they also have a stake in the world.

And that was the crux of my entire speech, that we all have a stake in this world, and we have an equal stake. I never said someone had more stake and others had less stake. Indeed, we felt that those who refused to have nuclear weapons and had signed the NPT, the world owes more to them to make sure that the mightful get rid of any nuclear weapons. And that is what we were arguing all the time. Even in

difficult moments in that small committee meeting, that people would say some things and we would say, "But look - we, for example, had given up nuclear weapons." Would people have preferred that we did not give it up, if you nuclear weapons are so important?

Michal Onderco:

But -

Abdul Minty:

Because the case is made continually by them -

Michal Onderco:

- yeah.

Abdul Minty:

- that nuclear weapons are very important for their security. Well, what about our security? And if that is valid, then more countries will say, "We, too, want nuclear weapons." And that's why the Principle and Objectives are very important, because they were aimed at trying to create a global environment where we would have no nuclear weapons.

Michal Onderco:

But did you, at the time, for example, expect that the Treaty would welcome new members? That new members would join the Treaty?

Abdul Minty:

We thought that some may join the Treaty, but nothing was done in order to focus our work on possible new members, no.

Michal Onderco:

So, which were the most important countries at the time that you were considering could join the Treaty at a later point?

Abdul Minty:

No, we never worked that out anywhere. We never said that if we give this, we'll get this and this country to join.

Michal Onderco:

Okay.

Abdul Minty:

We were concerned in making that conference successful.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Abdul Minty:

And to the extent to which we get the consensus decision - that would be nearly 90 percent - make it easier if anyone else wanted to join because that could be the collective will of all those countries who attend the conference. And there were large numbers.

Michal Onderco:

You mentioned a few times the Middle East weapons-of-mass-destruction-free zone, on which resolution was also part of the package that passed the NPT.

Abdul Minty:

[affirmative]

Michal Onderco:

And of course, the South African apartheid regime had very lively relations with Israel on this issue. Did those matter in any way in your thinking about the Middle East and the zone free of weapons of mass destruction?

Abdul Minty:

No. We were fully committed to no country needing to have nuclear weapons. We were fully committed to that. And otherwise, I don't think we, ourselves, would have supported the South African government position to give up nuclear weapons. So, we were fully committed to ending nuclear weapons. We saw the big danger in the Middle East.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Abdul Minty:

And we, ourselves, as a country, as South Africa, that has collaborated a long time with Israel, also felt that they should, if it can be resolved, it is an important issue. The other thing to remember is that the Africans nuclear weapons free zone was also very important to us. Internationally, people don't seem to pay much attention on it.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Abdul Minty:

But for over 50 African countries, it's been vital. Now, the African nuclear-weapon-free zone, is contiguous to the Middle East zone. So, if we get the neighbors of the African nuclear-weapon-free zone having a battle over nuclear and other weapons, it's bound to affect us.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Abdul Minty:

Whereas, if we could ban the nuclear weapons across the South in that way in, say Latin America - as we've done - and then in the Middle East, we would've extended the area that will be free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. So, it was a very important political step on the basis of principles, for a country like South Africa.

Michal Onderco:

So -

Abdul Minty:

We had to do it. And we thought very hard on it. And then, obviously the United States has very great difficulty because it intrudes a great deal by Israeli policy. And

in some ways, they had to make some concessions and sacrifices on that in order to get position.

You know, sometimes we have to do that, again. I know because we had done it. So, the Middle East was very, very important in approaching this issue of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

Michal Onderco:

Did you, at the time, liaise also with the Egyptian and American negotiators who were negotiating also since Madrid? Because since Madrid, there was a working group on arms control in the Middle East, and the negotiations that continued in New York were sort of an extension of that. Were you in touch with them also before?

Abdul Minty:

No. We were in touch with Egypt before.

Michal Onderco:

Okay.

Abdul Minty:

Because we had our very important issue, as an African country, and at a lot of the meetings the African countries [unintelligible]. So, we certainly discussed it in detail with the Egypt. And subsequently talked.

Michal Onderco:

And did you at any moment also discuss the issue with Israel?

Abdul Minty:

No, because Israel is not a member of the NPT and it would not in any way be involved in any negotiations or discussions. So, we didn't have any discussion with Israel about the resolution on Middle East.

Michal Onderco:

But of course, the Middle East, if there ever is going to be a Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone in the Middle East, Israel needs to be part of it.

Abdul Minty:

Yes, but the United States and many other countries can do that and usually they will continue to have a dialogue. I'm sure they will.

Michal Onderco:

Okay.

Abdul Minty:

Because we didn't see ourselves as a country that could do that.

Michal Onderco:

I have a few questions to close up but, before I go there, you already alluded a number of times to your position prior to the transition towards democracy and your work in Oslo, and so on and so forth. Did you - apart from the experience that you gained - did you also use these connections later in terms of advancing the South African position at the NPT Review and Extension Conference?

Abdul Minty:

Well, I wouldn't say that I used the connection. I mean, I knew some heads of state, some foreign ministers, some senior diplomats through my earlier work.

Michal Onderco:

Yes.

Abdul Minty:

So, some of them I would have some respect towards so - respect for what we're doing - so we engaged with them. And they still were undecided whether they could trust us or work with us in that way, but we had a very high degree of trust and confidence, even with people that I had never met before.

Michal Onderco:

Yes.

Abdul Minty:

So - and there were things for us, we'd have to start in the United States. Because the United States is a very important member of the NPT. And in the Non-Aligned Movement. And the African states. So, we worked with these regional groups. And the EU, we interacted with them. So, some of the diplomats from my files] in New York, I had to talk to them in different modes elsewhere.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Abdul Minty:

In Indiana, at the IAEA meetings, where I used to keep regular contact with them because I had to come year after year. And then there were other disarmament issues, I was also active on. So, and of course, the African leaders. I saw quite a few of them by also working with the OAU, on just the general anti-apartheid work.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Abdul Minty:

And my office in Oslo also had patrons, African heads of state, like Julius Nyerere, you know -

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Abdul Minty:

- and all the others. [unintelligible]. But it also had Olof Palme [spelled phonetically], Willy Brandt, and so on. So, we had quite a wide network.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Abdul Minty:

And these were like networks superimposed on other networks, no?

Michal Onderco:
Yeah, yeah.

Abdul Minty:

And they all existed. So, also our government, our leaders, and you know, interaction and support. Nelson Mandela had a great deal of input; I mean, if he got to speak to some head of states, you are able to persuade them. And so, also Deputy President Thabo Mbeki, as well as the foreign ministers. So, we had, you know, some other people more important than myself who could talk to them and put forward a point of view. But it's also dependent on the vision the others had. So, at that time, when the negotiations stopped taking place, many had the vision. Some, of course, the nuclear-weapon states - simply wanted an indefinite extension.

And so, we had difficulties in getting the principles, objectives, and other things and then to get the resolution through. It wasn't easy to get them [unintelligible] but we did get it through. And then, later - you know, without any action - for a very long time, until we came to 2010, and then 2015. And we didn't make, you know, that much progress. Although we made progress by having it put on the list again as something to be discussed at the last NPT review meeting. And it was discussed, and of course, it was something that we failed on.

Michal Onderco:

You mention that when South African leaders went to discuss and raise issues to other countries, they were listened to. Wasn't there ever a suspicion that South Africa is sort of trying to also lecture other countries? You know, because since it's the biggest and the most powerful country in Africa, there is a risk that its attempts to get its positions across may be misconstrued as a lecturing of other countries?

Abdul Minty:

We never heard this.

Michal Onderco:

Okay

Abdul Minty:

I don't think you would find any African leaders, as an example, who would say that President Mandela lectured.

Michal Onderco:

Okay.

Abdul Minty:

Because the one thing about him was that he always listened. So, we never heard that. And then, I think many of them also recognized that as country that had nuclear weapons and that was now fighting nuclear weapons anywhere, we wanted to create a more peaceful world and they respected that. And not only because of our words, but because of our action throughout.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Abdul Minty:

They would be familiar with our actions, and African countries knew about our role in terms of peacekeeping in Africa, how to build a united continent, how to be active on

the African nuclear-weapon-free zone.

We created important roles on that. And they - I mean, I was not expecting when I attended the meeting of the African nuclear weapon free zone in Addis Ababa that I would become the chairman. Because the organization of the nuclear-weapon-free zone actually was to be hosted in South Africa.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Abdul Minty:

I thought we wouldn't be the chair, I didn't expect it. When I arrived in Addis. I was told by the officials of the OAU, that while I was elected that I should be the chair and I said

"maybe you should find someone else", and they said, "No, you helped us with OAU resolutions on the subject. So, we want you there." And then, I couldn't say, "No."

So, I served on that, as I say, in the first chair of the African nuclear-weapon-free zone, and I did that for my term of three years without any difficulty. I worked with all African countries. You know, every meeting. So, no one had ever said to us in that period "We don't want to hear from you because, you know, you are lecturing to us," or whatever.

Michal Onderco:

Yes.

Abdul Minty:

And then so, they had to take us on our record. You see what I mean?

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Abdul Minty:

And if we had a bad record or were doing bad things, then they should tell. And that we would've respected. Not only from them, not only from African countries, but Asian countries and the Non-Aligned Movement as a whole.

Michal Onderco:

After the conference, when the Treaty was extended indefinitely and there was passage of the resolution on the Principles and Objectives, and the resolution on the Strengthened review process, was South African government satisfied with the outcome?

Abdul Minty:

Yes. We were as satisfied as we could because when you go to a multilateral, and you go with a proposal, you can't expect the proposal to come through 100 percent, word for word.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Abdul Minty:

At the end, because you have to talk, because you are buying in commitment to a

position. So, we were satisfied with the outcome. We thought it was a very big move forward. Now, what happened after that was a pity, and that is that the big powers in particular did not send senior people to the very various NPT meetings. To the review meetings and the preparatory meetings. You see, the preparatory meetings were also considered by us to be something would have building blocks.

Michal Onderco:

Yes.

Abdul Minty:

On the subject. So, you would agree something at one preparatory meeting and then the next one you would agree something on some other issues, and so on, and the third one. So, you would have three important areas, because they all dealt with a different area, which would be agreed through the preparatory meetings and then it would be approved at the review meetings.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Abdul Minty:

Now unfortunately, those meetings, I'm afraid the big powers did not send senior people with whom you could negotiate. They sent diplomats at various levels - ambassadors, or lower than that - but you couldn't really negotiate with them because they had no mandate to negotiate. So, it looked as if they quite happy that it was a stalemate, and that was the greatest disappointment, that all the expectations that we had were not really carried out. The other thing is that, throughout those meetings and other meetings, there was far more importance put on non-proliferation than on disarmament.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Abdul Minty:

And this is something we were seriously disappointed in. We also raised that in the nuclear review that President Obama started, the nuclear security conferences [Nuclear Security Summits]- and I attended two or three of those as the Sherpa for South Africa. Again, we tried, each one of them, to get some statement because the nuclear disarmament by the big powers. They wouldn't agree even to make me a statement.

So, we are not saying that we overturned the situation. We tried to improve it by getting a by-in, and we got a by-in. Now, the problem for the international diplomacy, unfortunately, is that you often go to a meeting and you'll get the consensus, or you get agreement, after a lot of hard work and in that, you make compromises and concessions because you want everyone to be involved and everyone to have a share in the outcome. You can get an outcome, and then in some cases - not all of them - but in some cases, the ink has hardly dried and the big powers walk away from it because they aren't really interested.

Michal Onderco:

What were your expectations for the future immediately after the conference?

Abdul Minty:

Well, immediately after the conference the expectations were that when the first meeting took place on the issue that we had identified and we discussed it, and so

we'd made some progress.

But, as I say to you, both in the NPT process and other processes, unfortunately, the Western countries put total emphasis on non-proliferation.

And not on disarmament. And so, this, we thought, was very dangerous in the world that we live.

It isn't the case. Some people project that the Third World is not very much in favor of non-proliferation, and I challenge people at some of the review meetings, the last one in Geneva - NPT - where one of the European countries stated that the Third World countries are not as committed to non-proliferation because of lack of progress on disarmament.

And I stood up, and it was a dialogue session, you know? You're supposed to talk each other. I stood up and I said, "Please, tell me. Which non-aligned country is doing less on non-proliferation because of disarmament? I would like to know." That delegation and all other delegations who normally support us simply refused to speak. As you look at the global situation, we were among the countries that took the strongest action against the AQ Khan network.

Michal Onderco:
Yeah.ss

Abdul Minty:

And the IAEA said, and the DG of the IAEA at that time, said that the biggest threat to the NPT was the network. Now we've found that a South African company was also involved in violating the regulations that we have on non-proliferation. But the facts of the matter are that some 30-40 countries were involved in that network. They had supplied equipment, legally and illegally, to some of those places where some of them have operations. And yet, they didn't take as serious action as we did. We're the only country who took action.

I gave the full report to the IAEA Board of Governors as to what we did in the court, and we searched and worked so hard on that prosecution that we caused those who were accused to plead guilty. And it's very important in such cases to get them to plead guilty and not to have them go through the details of the court case, because if you go through the details in a court case, you'll also, at the same time, give information to the whole world about which items are of dual for the nuclear weapons and we didn't want to do that.

So, we cooperated very closely with others - the United States congratulated us for our remarkable work - and there were also so many of the other countries involved. Many Europeans took no action. And when they discussed it at one of the meetings, at the NPT in New York, I mentioned this fact. And so, we put a stop to people then accusing us of various things which were not true. But they feel that because they have power they can make allegations against Third World countries. But we stood up for some of these things. Some countries don't always tell us because there are consequences for that, because other governments knew, had other leverage and methods of punishing them. That we are the subjects that retain their integrity ever since 1994. So, I think that there are global issues that are not discussed, that are not looked at seriously enough, that are conveniently put on the side because they are difficult for some countries.

That is not a proper way to have academic discussions because there is no true basic fact. So, the record doesn't make Third World countries look bad on non-proliferation,

but the record certainly makes the big countries bad on nuclear disarmament. And more and more, we are getting nuclear umbrella states increasing, and as you get them increasing, the area of nuclear weapons use or possible use is extended.

So, we are living in a very unfair and unbalanced world because of that, and when we raise that, not many people want to listen. So, the danger now is that people do not have great expectation about nuclear disarmament because more and more weapons are being modernized, more are produced, and less and less international control is being exercised over that. They are not even transparent about it.

I mean, this is the great difficulty and the fundamentals about the whole NPT process. I did say at the last NPT Review Conference. I made quite a long statement - just extremely well received by the countries of the South and others - and there I said the problem was that we are always told that they need nuclear weapons for security. So, if country A needs it for security, why should country B, C, and D not claim that they need it for security?

So, you can't, you know, do something yourself for your own security and say to the rest of the world, "You must never have nuclear weapons because it's not in the interest of those who do have them." That is not the way to create a fair and equal world so everyone has an equal stake in peace and security. It is creating a lopsided world.

So, I said, "The danger is that the NPT could become the Treaty of the Nuclear-Weapon States". And that is the greatest danger that is facing the global society now, and we must avoid that. This is not something that should happen. But if the nuclear-weapon states continue to behave as they have done, then they will create that perception, that the NPT is actually a treaty for the nuclear-weapon states.

And that is how, of course, when we got the conclusion from the last NPT Review Conference, as I said, because of the failure on the Middle East question and also on all the other things. It was also the conference of the NPT since 1995 where the final document that was put before the conference, even though it was a draft, was not a negotiated document.

Normally, the President announces the committee and the committee works through compromises. I was on this committee again this time, and I was lucky to be on all of them since 1995. But it was never negotiated. The draft [unintelligible]. And they thought that they would have to put something through, and I thought some negotiations must have taken place behind the doors separately in separate rooms, with the nuclear-weapon states and others, and so various so-called "compromised positions" were put forward which were really backwards tipped instead of in a forward tipped, even on nuclear disarmament. So, we were very unhappy about the whole process, and the outcome.

Michal Onderco:

Before we end, I want to ask you one more question about what was your expectation about the Middle East? You talked a lot about how much attention you gave to it; so, when there was a resolution about the Middle East weapons-of-mass-destruction-free zone, did you expect it to happen within the foreseeable future?

Abdul Minty:

Well, it depends on what you call foreseeable.

Michal Onderco:

Okay.

Abdul Minty:

I did expect that there would be a step-by-step walk to enter that. And in 2010, in New York at the NPT review meeting, when the United States agreed to the resolution again, that we should repeat position of '95, we thought that was quite a courageous step by the government, by Washington.

And officials from Washington came to New York, and we met with them, and they shuttled back to Washington and came back. It was a serious attempt to make some progress. And if we had kept that kind of collective will, we could have made progress because, you see, what many people forget is that as long as we don't make progress on that, we also increase the danger of proliferation.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Abdul Minty:

So, if one country has it, and as we told since '95 and before, to have any nuclear weapons is a danger to others. Then, if we'll come to a meeting, then it's either Israel or Israel's allies or friends, then we open up the possibility, you know? I think it's extremely dangerous.

So, we talked generally in a lot of ways and made a less dangerous world, at least the dialogue starts, and I think the group later they appointed had the political support, you could have held a few consultations at least with Israel and other countries. To see what the possibilities are. What could be, you know, a step one, step two, step three. And even if there was disagreement initially, at least the issues would be raised. And we could all discuss it. But we never got that because there wasn't any political will. So, it's clearly an absence of political will to control that issue, and that creates a very dangerous world.

Michal Onderco:

I have reached the end of the list of my questions, but before I end I want to ask if there is something major about the 1995 conference that I should have asked about and I didn't? Is there something big that I forgot?

Abdul Minty:

Well, I think that, in general, since someone asked me is that before we've went to the conference, we thought that there would be great danger from not having a consensus decision. And so, the future of the NPT would have a big question mark. When issues were out or go forward with the nuclear-weapon states agreeing and the rest of the international community agreeing. Therefore, we had gone with the position that we only wanted a limited period. It would've created multiple possibilities of nuclear weapons being developed in countries who are planning to do so after that period.

So, they would no longer be bound by it. And then, so globally, we needed a solution to keep the world together and to increase the authority of the NPT. So, I think that our proposals did that; although, we were almost alone when we began putting it forward. I think it shows that if you work with integrity and relevant to the issues, it's possible to mobilize the international community on the same course of actions. But there are many disappointments. The main ones are that the nuclear-weapon states did not do their parts, and then therefore, the review meetings and others had not been able to deal with this particular issue. And so, we go from one five-year period to the next one and to the next one, hopping from one to the other. We have some meetings that we couldn't have consensus on, so they just didn't work. And then, the

2010 one, which we worked very hard on, many countries in the South, we got a very good outcome decision. Even that was thrown out subsequently by some of the governments. So, they just didn't agree with it.

So, I think, at that time, we did get the world together on a possible same course of action, but other political developments took place that made it impossible to go forward. What it shows is that even the small, weak countries, you may build something on confidence and mutual respect and equality of all, then they can make progress if they create a program from the United Nations and long term. So, that's, I think, perhaps a lesson of the '95 meeting.

Michal Onderco:

I want to thank you very much for your time and for your insight that you have shared.