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Oral History Interview with Christopher Westdal

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Canada's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva (1999-2003)

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Christopher Westdal

Canada

Oral history interview conducted by Michal Onderco by Skype on 17 February 2017

Michal Onderco:

Okay, well, thank you very much for finding the time to talk to me and to, to discuss with me your participation in the 1995 NPT Review Conference.

Chris Westdal:

Okay, well, listen, I'd gladly speak with you, but I should explain the context. I was Canada's Ambassador for Disarmament twice, once for a year, 1995 and in that year, I did the NPT Review Conference, and then later, 1999 to 2003, I was Canada's Ambassador for Disarmament in Geneva to the Conference on Disarmament, to the First Committee, and to the NPT. So, I was present at both the 1995, and particularly, the 2000 NPT Conference. Among other things I find now that I haven't thought about these things for decades intensely, that I mix up my memories of the two events. I just might want to ramble a bit about some memories, some of them, both because I think your ambit is quite broad, and you're looking at how multilateralism works and so on. But when I look back without having refreshed my memory. I just haven't had time to look back and read through those documents I mentioned, particularly those by Tariq Rauf, and I hope you'll be able to speak to him and give him my best regards and read what he and Rebecca Johnson write about that and every other aspect of nuclear policy as you would know. I look on 2000 as the high point of at least rhetorical disarmament, the unequivocal, what was the term, unequivocal commitment, undertaking, unequivocal undertaking I think was the phrase, 13 steps which would have been quite dramatic had they happened.

But if I recall, they began immediately with a comprehensive test ban treaty which has been in the ditch in Washington for decades now, but the point is in Clinton's last few months, that was kind of a high point, and I think, motivating some of his officials might have been this notion of a legacy, but I think there was already an anticipation that government would change anyway. Regardless of what they thought was coming, that was the high point, and it was immediately obliterated by the arrival of George Bush and John Bolton and all of those who had no time whatever for any kind of multilateral verification, without which, none of those nuclear steps and trust is anyway possible. So, it was a high point. We've been descending since. I think at the moment we are in an alarming condition of nuclear escalation, but I won't rehearse all that, but the announcement of a trillion dollars to renew the entire nuclear triad of the United States. Russia's test of nuclear capable cruise missiles, possible violation of treaties, and the quite stunning Trump conversation with Putin when Putin says, well I think we should renew START and Trump interrupts the call either to ask what is START or to find out some detail about it. Twice during the campaign he referred to "START up." One's inclined to think that he had to pause the phone to be advised what is START about and that's not so startling. It's rocket science after all, but the point is he returned to the phone call to say no, that was a stupid deal. We've given everything away, the hell with that. So, with respect to the prospect for nuclear disarmament, we are going off the cliff at the moment. Have been for some time, but that's a bit of an aside. It is only to underline that 2000 was the high point and that's now 17 years ago. Thinking about my disarmament days, I recall a quotation interesting for someone in Holland. Are you Dutch?

Michal Onderco:

No, I'm not Dutch, actually. I'm born in Slovakia and studied all over in Europe and now living in Holland.

Chris Westdal:

Understood, but -- oh the reason it was interesting for someone either Dutch or working with Dutchmen, is that I have recently taken to repeating a line. I used to use when I was Ambassador for Disarmament. It's -- when you're Ambassador for Disarmament, you are climbing straight up mountains. That's understood, but I used to quote William the Silent, but William the Silent, a figure in Dutch history, said, "It is not necessary to be hopeful to persevere." I think that is a profound -- there's a liberation in that. It's almost something to live by, but it is the point in nuclear disarmament. It doesn't matter how hopeless you think the cause might be, it is our duty to persevere and to try to contain these dangers -- it is a disgrace to our civilization that for now seventy years, we've had in our basement a bomb ready to go off and end us all, and we seem to be a blind about it now. But the point is, hopelessness is a bit irrelevant, and that applies in our lives, too. I mean until the last afternoon, the deck chairs on the Titanic needed to be sorted out, and it was someone's duty to arrange them. The people I have most respect for on the Titanic were the last guys bailing. In the sense that always, even though it's hopeless, you do your duty, and we clearly have a duty to try to contain the dangers of nuclear arms. So, I remember that, and I'm reminded of it now, and it was my guiding principle when I worked in nuclear disarmament. Now, can I ramble on this way? Is it useful to you?

Michal Onderco:

It's useful. I have a list of questions that I want to ask you, but you can either ramble on, and I'll ask -- I'll go to my questions later or I can start asking with my questions.

Chris Westdal:

I'll only ramble on a bit longer to recall the 1995 event. When I think back to 1995, and the achievement of permanence with accountability, and when I remember how the P5 assured the world that they were bound by -- and their hawks were oh-so disturbed by Article 5 [6?] of the NPT that swore them to try to get rid of their arms. You could describe that as the height of hypocrisy in the history of the NPT. It's clear in the phrase itself, permanence with accountability. There's an element of contradiction right in that, in that if there is to be accountability, then how can there be permanence? So, I think that looking back at that meeting, it is surprising that the P5, whose fidelity to Article 6 was surely to be questioned, managed to persuade enough, beyond a majority, and then ultimately managed to have the extension without a vote. When you consider that there were many who were skeptical, even among their allies, that they were serious about Article 6, and when the chairman did not want an indefinite extension, and when others led by, I remember the South Africans, and there were groups whose names I might mix up, but at the end of the day... It's the one thing, if my grandchildren ask me, what did I do? The only thing that's -- the first thing that would be noted would be that the NPT was extended without a vote. I remember campaigning, I remember going to -- from Ottawa going to Geneva, going to Vienna, going to New York, and each of those places, our embassy would have gathered six or eight ambassadors of the countries that we were lobbying. There were quite a few of them, and then I remember in New York, going from mission to mission. I don't know how many I went to, but it must have been scores, and some of those New York permanent representatives were very grateful to be consulted individually about a matter like nuclear affairs - that didn't usually happen - and were grateful to be visited at their own quarters - which often didn't happen, they'd meet instead in New York. And I remember from all of that, that personal relations count in multilateral meetings and events, particularly those that are dragged out where you have people working cheek by jowl for sometimes weeks on end, away from home, crazy hours. Sometimes the personal aspects get quite intense.. So, why don't you go ahead with your questions.

Michal Onderco:

Okay. So, -- you already told me you were the Canadian Ambassador for Disarmament in 1995. What was, what was your portfolio before you became the CD

Ambassador?

Chris Westdal:

Well, I came new entirely to disarmament. I had -- let me just say -- I have to think about that, in '95, I had been most recently Ambassador to South Africa. I was there when the South Africans renounced their nuclear weapons, but I didn't know that I was going to become Ambassador for Disarmament, but it was relevant. So, I had been ambassador in South Africa from 91 to 93, then I spent a year, '93/4 at Royal Roads University in British Columbia in Canada, but now before from '87 to '91, I had been the Director General of International Organizations which included the United Nations and all of those bodies. Before that, from '82 to '85, I had been Ambassador to Burma and High Commissioner to Bangladesh, and now I'm reciting my whole CV. I had worked in Ottawa at the Privy Council, and at CIDA. I'd had an aid background before that, that's what led me to Bangladesh. Anyway, the point is I had no disarmament experience.

But I did, I did, forgive me, I did have much multilateral experience because I had been for four years the Director General of International Organizations, and disarmament is very much a multilateral affair, at least the NPT is. So, I did have that relevant experience.

Michal Onderco:

So, how did the post debate about Canadian position at the 1995 RevCon shape up within the Ministry of foreign affairs, within Canada?

Chris Westdal:

My memory is that as Ambassador for Disarmament, I needed to agree all this with our Director General of Security Policy. Ralph Lysyshyn at the time, and we quite quickly agreed that the best prospect, an imperfect prospect, was the indefinite extension, and that was recommended. It was not a controversial issue of policy within the ministry, and there was no particular objection to it in this very small community of officials and then some of the public that paid attention to nuclear policy. So, there was no great struggle about that policy position. It was not known at the time how active a role Canada would end up playing in promoting the indefinite extension, but that was never controversial either. We welcomed a chance to try to achieve what was defined as the number one security priority of Canada, to achieve the indefinite extension of the NPT. I remember that in one of the annual publications of the ministry saying what it was doing, the extension was listed as number one and, of course, for us all the NPT, it is hard to imagine anything more important than the goals of the NPT.

Michal Onderco:

So, who were the people within your unit that were working with you on this issue?

Chris Westdal:

Oh, I'd have to try to remember names. I know that I'd leave some out. Rather than try to recite names, and I would literally forget them, but I can tell you what our team consisted of. It consists of a director in Ottawa who kept track daily, hourly as need be to make sure that we never crossed anything that he thought would be a problem either with senior officials or with the government and the ministers. So, you kind of had a full-time Ottawa check, a very well-played role, and then you worked with usually one or two or three staffers that would come down from Ottawa. One for each committee, including some from outside the department, from the nuclear agencies, and then typically there'd be someone from -- people would have come from our mission in -- well no, forgive me, we didn't have an Ambassador for Disarmament in Geneva in 1995, so these people were coming from Ottawa, and we also had the help of people from our mission in New York. There would have been a

team of six, eight, ten people; twelve if you added the people in Ottawa and Geneva keeping track as well, who were working -- who were taking this very seriously for month on end.

Michal Onderco:

When you were talking about the position in favor of indefinite extension, you said at the beginning, it was not foreseen that Canada would play such a prominent role. When did that happen? When did Canada assume such a prominent role?

Chris Westdal:

You'd have to check whether there was anything formal - I'm not sure there was. I don't think we were chairing anything formal. It began at a meeting I recall, Gregory Berdennikov was there. It was not clear how to catalyze the decision, and the notion arose to circulate, it was drafted by the British, a one or two sentence simple resolution in favor of indefinite extension and get people to sign that, i.e., no secret ballot, signed up, committed in advance. And who was going to sell that? Who was going to promote it? Who was going to get the number of votes required to prove that there was going to be [an indefinite extension] -- I don't think there was a special majority required, and I forget what the precise number was that we needed, but who was going to prove that the extension was going to be indefinite? We volunteered or were asked or seemed natural or just became the leader of the group. I don't even know if it was called the chairmanship, and I honestly don't remember what were the groups that we formed. At one point, I remember there being a cosmopolitan core group. Now, I don't remember whether that was in 95 or 2000, but the point of cosmopolitan was that we were recruiting people from all the different groups, and I mentioned earlier the kind of personal campaigning and persuasion that entailed. It's relevant to note that many of the representatives to the NPT would have been the representatives to the UN of a great many small countries, in Africa and elsewhere whose capitals don't pay a whole lot of attention to nuclear affairs and whose representatives would have had, if not a free hand, even in an open vote, would have had a quite decisive say in which way their country should vote. Now, when one thinks about the countless ways in which the P5 - the Americans and the four - can influence all of the voters in the UN, it is not particularly surprising that a majority were led to say, yes, indeed, we will support indefinite extension. They may have been reacting to arm twisting, I won't call it arm twisting, but reacting to demarches that would have been done in their own capitals by the P5, pushing for this or they were persuaded by our campaign and others.

Michal Onderco:

When you say our campaign, you mean Canadian campaign?

Chris Westdal:

I mean Canadian, but of course we didn't do it alone. We did run the show, though, of keeping track of these scores that needed to be persuaded, and it was not known how they were voting and, of course, some didn't want to sign up soon. Some wanted to sign up later. We joked about giving a toaster to whichever country it was, a free toaster, to whichever it representative was who took us over the top. Whatever that number was. I think it was something like 109 or something, and the 109th was going to get a free toaster. I can't remember which country it was, but those are the dimensions of the campaign I remember. As I just mentioned, the P5 have a lot of levers to use and, of course, they had to overcome a lot of reluctance because it seemed like a permanent blessing for a, for a promise that wasn't being kept.

Michal Onderco:

If I may ask here: in the fourth PrepCom which was in January, South Africa presented something called the third option, the South African option which was basically a rolling expansion every 20 or 25 years, and some of the documents mentioned that

at the conference, Canada hosted a dinner with -- where South Africans were invited to present these proposals more in public.

Chris Westdal:

Yes

Michal Onderco:

Can you tell me more about what you thought about those proposals, about what happened at the dinner and so on and so forth.

Chris Westdal:

Well, I wouldn't remember the specific dinner, but yes, from -- I mean the cheap shot at the campaign was that, well, this was just permanence. This is just giving away the whole shop. So, the answer had to be to strengthen it as much as possible by adopting these principles and objectives, and Goosen of South Africa, a very capable guy, was leading that whole charge. Dhanapala was quite concerned that it not just be a bare permanence, and he wanted something other -- I think he wanted something other than indefinite extension. I think he wanted a kind of conditional extension too, but there was a steamroller, call it a steamroller, or call it a kind of consensus by momentum. As the numbers mounted, it was clear that it was going to happen, and there was not going to be a rolling conditional kind of extension. The argument used against some kind of conditional extension, ruling, whatever by decades, was simply that any risk to this sole commitment that we had from the P5 to get rid of their weapons and from this sole framework that we have for others not to make arms, any risk to it is foolish. We should permanently commit ourselves to this even if we're not confident. I began all of this by talking about whether we're hopeful or not that it will be implemented. We really have no choice but to extend it indefinitely. So, those principles became vitally important because they helped the pill go down, they sweetened the pill.

Michal Onderco:

Yes, do you think it would have been possible to persuade countries to go with the extension even without the Principles and Objectives?

Chris Westdal:

No, I don't think so. Well, I mean they might have had their arms twisted to do it, but they wouldn't have liked it, and it wouldn't have been really rationalizable. It wouldn't have been sellable. It wouldn't have been credible I think, and certainly in the dynamics of the meeting, it had to be an "okay permanence, but there's got to be some way of holding these parties to account". That was what the South Africans and the chairman were trying to do. That leads back to what I was saying about the inherent contradiction because they'll hold them accountable, they'll try to strengthen the review process, but, but so what? If it's permanent, it's permanent. So, there was always that tension, but our judgement was that it was better to have the permanence and try to strengthen the review and try to make these principles stick, and to act within the treaty rather than to try to act outside the treaty. It's a convincing argument.

Michal Onderco:

Can you tell me more about the cooperation between Canada and South Africa before the conference and at the conference? Or was there any?

Chris Westdal:

No, it kind of tests my memory. My feeling is that we brought different emphases to the conference, and it wouldn't surprise me if the South Africans thought -- now, do I remember? Did they favor a rolling conditional model from the start? I mean I just

don't -- my memory is too hazy. But I have distinct memories of Peter Goosen being skeptical of a kind of a bare-bones permanence without enough attention paid to the principles and objectives, and the review process, and so on.

Michal Onderco:

At the Fourth PrepCon South Africans proposed the rolling extension and but their opening speech to the conference was when they said that they will support indefinite extension. So, they shifted between the 4th PrepCom and the Conference.

Chris Westdal:

And I'm sure that there were some on their side who were disappointed that they shifted that way. But I would give Dhanapala and South Africa, and there were others great credit for all that did accompany the extension. Because again, that resolution that I got however many to sign, was two sentences long. So, it had to be accompanied by a great deal else.

Michal Onderco:

And were you also part of the negotiations in the president's committee when the principles and objectives were being negotiated?

Chris Westdal:

Yes, Canada was, I wasn't. My deputy was. His name was Sven Jurschewsky. He'd be a good guy for you to speak to, too. He's been active in the field for years.

Michal Onderco:

So your task was mainly to focus on the collection of the signatures.

Chris Westdal:

Yes, to demonstrate that there was a majority in favor of indefinite extension.

Michal Onderco:

So, tell me more about how you tried to persuade countries, especially the ones that were more reluctant.

Chris Westdal:

Well, I earlier described literally, it felt like political campaigning. I went to dinners that were organized by our embassy in some restaurants in New York, in Geneva, and there would have been six or eight at each of them. You held four of them, you've met 32, and then some others elsewhere, I wouldn't remember them all.

Michal Onderco:

But was there still -- was there still lobbying going on at the conference?

Chris Westdal:

Oh, sure, and at the conference, what I did, was literally walk around Manhattan from UN mission to UN mission, and talked to them about the NPT, and we kept track, and as I say, there were scores. I don't know how many I would have called on, but the numbers are in the record. How many were signed up, by what date, and when it was clear, and the number 109 sticks in mind, maybe it's the wrong number, that there would be a majority.

And now the arguments that were used were -- I mean we weren't arm twisting. Canada doesn't have arm-twisting power. We argued the merits of the case that we

were better off, everyone was better off, with a permanent NPT, and these -- and the commitments that would go along with it in the form of the principles and objectives and the strengthened review process. However, those latter two were elaborated in the course of the conference. It didn't all begin as one package.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah, so you stated they weren't one package, that they were elaborated in the course of the conference?

Chris Westdal:

Yes, indeed. So, that when I was campaigning beforehand for an indefinite extension, there wasn't already developed at that point, the package that Dhanapala and Goosen and others put together to accompany. What was that group called? It's called the President's Group or something like that.

Michal Onderco:

It was Friends of President.

Chris Westdal:

Exactly, and Jurschewsky, our man Sven Jurschewsky, worked closely with Goosen of South Africa. In fact, I think they're friends to this day.

Michal Onderco:

And did they, did they have any sort of contact or cooperation before that? Before the conference?

Chris Westdal:

I honestly don't remember. I don't know. I'm -- given that as you said, until the 4th PrepCom and then some, and I wasn't around at the time of the 4th PrepCom. I only arrived, oh, Spring of 199...

Michal Onderco:

Five?

Chris Westdal:

1995, exactly. So, I wasn't there for the 4th PrepCom, and I don't know what when on between South Africa and Canada at that 4th PrepCom, but we were taking different approaches. I'm sure we were already in some dissent at 4th PrepCom if South Africa was still advocating a conditional rolling extension, but probably South Africa was also already promoting the Principles and Objectives, and review process, that it elaborated at the conference. So, in answer to your question, though I don't know, it's quite credible to me that Canadian and South African delegations would have discussed at the 4th PrepCom and 3rd and earlier, what needed to be done to enhance accountability, whatever the extension terms. So, the answer to your question is probably yes. But I don't remember.

Michal Onderco:

You mentioned before the discussion that was -- a point was raised by Ambassador Berdennikov there should be a resolution with the signatures. When did that discussion happen? Was there already a conference or was it prior to the conference?

Chris Westdal:

Oh, no that -- well, I would have thought it happened in the early days of the

negotiation. I remember a meeting at the -- I think it's called the Writer's Club or the Pen and Ink Club or something like that. It's an artist's club in New York, and I remember coming out of that meeting -- that's right, that's where I was recruited to lead this effort to demonstrate that a majority supported indefinite extension. It's called the Pen -- Penman's Club or something like that.

Michal Onderco:
Could it be Leopard?

Chris Westdal:
Beg your pardon?

Michal Onderco:
Could it be Leopard?

Chris Westdal:
No, I do remember dinners at Leopard, but this particular -- I think this was a lunch.

Michal Onderco:
Okay.

Chris Westdal:
If I recall but, you know, these are 22-year-old memories. So, they're a bit fuzzy in my mind. But now I will take the time to say there are other people you might want to speak to. I don't know how much time you have or how thoroughly you can get into this, but one of them now thinking about all this, is Sven Jurschewsky and the other is, of course, beginning with Tariq Rauf I mentioned and who else would I think of? There might be others that come, but I would suggest Sven.

Michal Onderco:
Okay, I'll put him on the list.

Chris Westdal:
Good. Now, carry on.

Michal Onderco:
At the conference, there were two rival proposals. One was by Mexico, and the other one was by Venezuela. How strong did you feel the support for these two proposals? For these two rival proposals?

Chris Westdal:
My memory is that there was really not very much support for either. They never did get the numbers to be a credible alternative. Whether that meant that, you know, I don't know, 10 or 20, or 30 countries might have been thought to have a good opinion of these proposals. They were never in a position as we were with the proposal for an indefinite extension to prove that there was a majority.

Michal Onderco:
So, why did you then go with the idea of collecting the signatures and not, for example, rely on voting or go for other possibilities?

Chris Westdal:

Because we wanted it without a vote. We -- and we certainly wanted it by a very large majority if it wasn't going to be without a vote, and we saw the possibility of getting enough to sign on in public, openly. And we, of course, kept people well informed about the progress that we were making. So, you had this momentum building.

Michal Onderco:

The conference ended up with these famous three decisions, and there was also the resolution on the Middle East. Was the resolution on the Middle East something that you also mentioned when you were trying to negotiate the support for the resolution, for the decision, or was it something that only came later?

Chris Westdal:

I expect that for some parties it might have been a vital part of what they had to get done, but no I don't recall the Middle East resolution as being a very prominent part of the campaign to get the treaty extended. Here's the thing, in my memory, extending the treaty was more important than having a final product for the review conference. Now, in other years, it had -- there was kind of a fetish that you had to have a final product, everyone has to agree on the entire thing or else it's a failure. But at that conference, I think it was understood from the start, that the main business is "What's the future of this treaty?" If we don't manage to agree on a whole package, and if it comes a cropper about a Middle East resolution on the Middle East on the last day, we will at least have extended the treaty. So, I don't think that for many, that last Middle East resolution was crucial to their decision on the NPT extension.

Michal Onderco:

The negotiations that were ongoing about the number of countries that we're supporting, was there already at the time still a pressure exercised by the P5 on the countries in the conference?

Chris Westdal:

I expect that everyone of them had, probably had a call from their local P5 ambassadors presenting the case for an indefinite extension. So, they were probably all aware of the P5's desire. But I don't think there had yet been any arm twisting because P5 didn't want to arm twist or appear to arm twist and because such arm-twisting can backfire and does backfire.

Michal Onderco:

Can you give me an example?

Chris Westdal:

Well, what kind of arm twisting can you imagine? That's probably an unnecessarily pejorative phrase, but whether it be aid programs advanced or slowed down, or whether it be trade policy, whatever it might be.

Michal Onderco:

But can you give an example of how it can backfire?

Chris Westdal:

Countries don't like to be pushed around or appear to be pushed around. They'd rather be persuaded and, therefore, had there been much arm twisting early on? I don't think so. I think there would have been demarches trying to be persuasive because there was a very good case to be made. So, I would say that, in the end, I don't know that there was much arm twisting required, because the majority of

parties had, indeed, been persuaded it was the best thing to do.

Michal Onderco:

You already mentioned that you were not party to the president's negotiations, but do you at least know what stumbling blocks in those negotiations? Or what were the main problems?

Chris Westdal:

I'd have to look through even the headings of what the principles and objectives were and what they said and which ones might have been controversial within that group. I'm sure they had discussions about how strong can we make these -- how strong can we make the review process. How do we do that? Do we -- and then, you know, one was -- there were steps like, well we need a fourth review conference because as I recall, the practice was to have a first, second, third but not a fourth year review conference, so we'll add one, and what should the principles say? And I suppose they got as well into what program of action, what priorities, FMCT, before CTBT and how verification -- I'm sure they had long discussions about those questions.

But that's kind of speculation.

Michal Onderco:

You mentioned when you said that there were special interventions by South Africa and you mentioned Germany. Can you recall what were these special interventions by Germany?

Chris Westdal:

No, to be honest, I can't. I'm sure there were, and Germany was always a most conscientious and thorough participant, but as to the substance, I'd have to be reminded.

Michal Onderco:

You also already said that the president, Dhanapala, was very instrumental in getting the successful outcome. Even though he was not really a believer in that extension, how did the conversion happen?

Chris Westdal:

Well, it would have to do with the numbers. I do remember keeping the chairman, Dhanapala, informed regularly. I would go to his office and tell him the latest. Now, at one point well before we were anywhere near the majority, he did recognize, he might not have welcomed it, but he did recognize that this effort was going to succeed and that lent a certain urgency. Well, if your question is when did he forsake, however reluctantly, the rolling model -- the model different from indefinite extension - that he had in mind, I think the answer is when he saw that the effort to prove a majority was going to succeed. At that point, call that a conversion, call it an adaptation to an emerging reality. He's above all a realistic man. I wouldn't call it a conversion, so much as a recognition of reality.

Michal Onderco:

When you were trying to persuade countries, did you have any difficulty persuading any of the countries in the Western European group?

Chris Westdal:

I don't think so. They more or less agreed. When you consider that they're members of NATO, so that Western European group, no. It was never, it was never controversial within the Western Group, as far as I remember.

Michal Onderco:

And was it, was it easy to work with the NAM? Because the NAM at the time had a meeting in Bandung concomitantly with the conference and that meeting was not in favor of that indefinite extension.

Chris Westdal:

Exactly, and now was it difficult to work with him? Well, my answer is no. I don't remember -- I'd have to be reminded who the NAM representatives were, and the people that come to my mind, but I have no memory of acrimony. There were earnest discussions and earnest differences, but it was part of our strategy from the start to be very respectful of genuine differences because these were close calls, and none of these solutions was perfect. So, I don't recall difficult negotiations. Substantially difficult with real differences, but not difficult in the sense that we were unable to speak to one another. We spoke with one another regularly because that's the way the UN is. You can't avoid others. They're in the lobby. They're at coffee. It goes on and on.

Michal Onderco:

You mentioned that for many of the smaller countries, there is very little guidance that is given from the headquarters. How did, how did -- is it different to negotiate with a country like this compared to a country like Indonesia?

Chris Westdal:

Which were the two examples you cited?

Michal Onderco:

Well, I said either of the countries that sort of gets a little guidance from headquarters, and if you compare to a country like Indonesia, which as a very strong and longstanding tradition.

Chris Westdal:

Well, yeah it's the difference between night and day. For example, I remember calling on the Ambassador of Sierra Leone. Now, Sierra Leone at the time was ridden with civil war, and you can imagine that there was no one at home paying a whole lot of attention to our nuclear policy. So, you knew that the fellow you were speaking to was going to hear you or not, and see if it made sense or not, and decide how Sierra Leone was going to vote, and it was unlikely that he was going to be questioned about that. Or at the very least, he was going to have a very decisive role in how the country voted, but nothing at all like the case of the ambassadors of the countries like the one you mentioned, Indonesia, that has taken nuclear disarmament very seriously and has people both at its mission in New York, and its capital, and in Geneva who pay close attention and will contribute to a decision made by the minister, if not the head of government himself for major questions. So, it is the difference between night and day in that field.

Michal Onderco:

And do you also see major differences, for example, among the P5 because, for example, for France and China, it was the first conference they went to, the first NPT review conference.

Chris Westdal:

I don't recall differences among them. They were united throughout, I do believe. They may have had differences, I don't know between themselves beforehand about what to do, but those differences weren't obvious to me.

Michal Onderco:

Is there something I should have asked about your task of collecting signatures and getting the approvals and I didn't.

Chris Westdal:

Oh, I don't think so. I wouldn't have anything to add to it.

Michal Onderco:

And is there something, particularly important for understanding of the conference you think I should have asked about and didn't?

Chris Westdal:

No, though just to repeat some of the things I recall about it. There is a notion of consensus by momentum, and it seizes some multilateral settings, which are a world onto themselves. I don't know if you've worked at multilateral conferences obsessed with whatever. People get into a world of their own and into heads of their own in the basement of the UN, and they work 20 hours a day and it all gets quite crazy, but there is a momentum, and this demonstration of how many there were was surely an example of how eventually you became lonely if you hadn't signed, and the whole goal was to demonstrate that momentum in time, and the only other general notion I mention again is the inevitable tension between permanence and accountability and how it got sorted out by dressing the permanence as well as possible.

Michal Onderco:

My last question is: some of the observers and the attendees at the conference say that already back in 1995, it was possible to see the buds of what later became the Humanitarian Initiative, and it was possible to foresee that this will happen in short future.

Chris Westdal:

Well, the origins may well have been in the 1995 RevCon conference, and all of the quite ambitious principles and objectives that were set out may have inspired that initiative, and it's also quite credible to me that those who elaborated that initiative, and I don't know who they were, but they may well have been people together at the NPT Review Conferences, and so it's credible to me, that yes indeed, that initiative was generated from the spirit and some of the letter and wording of the NPT conference in '95 and may have been carried forward by some of the people who were gathered at the '95 NPT conference.

Michal Onderco:

And, given your experience, do you give a lot of -- do you have high hopes associated with, for example, the current attempts to negotiate a ban treaty?

Chris Westdal:

No, I don't have high hopes. I think that we are losing control of nuclear arms. The things I was mentioning at the beginning, and the prospect that START won't be renewed. The prospect that there will be more and perhaps smaller nuclear weapons developed. So, in short, no. I don't think these are very hopeful times. I think what's quite alarming is that we don't even seem to know what cyber warfare is going to or could consist of, but the combination of cyber warfare and the control of nuclear weapons starts getting almost as scary as the combination of terrorists and nuclear weapons. So, who knows? There may be some lining to the cloud - though a silver lining should never be mistaken for blue sky in that cyber warfare might obviate or make nuclear weapons obsolete and unnecessary. If you can fry a country's power grid with a good hack, why drop a bomb? Who knows? But cyber war, the overlap of cyber war and cyber techniques, and I -- it's far beyond my technical comprehension

where the edge of that struggle is, but to the extent, there's overlap between the computer and digital control of the weapons individually or all of them and nuclear arms, that's alarming stuff. Too tricky for me. You know, at the UN, you have three buttons to push. Yes, no or abstain, and in this field, I often wanted a fourth button "too tricky for me". But if you ask am I hopeful for nuclear disarmament? No, I'm not. I don't know how one could be. And is that alarming and depressing? Yes, it is, but it is not necessary to be hopeful to persevere.

Michal Onderco:

Well, on that note, I would like to thank you very much for your time and for all the wisdom that you have shared.

Chris Westdal:

Well, you're very welcome.