

EDITOR'S NOTE

The agreement late last year in the CD to establish an Ad Hoc Committee to negotiate a ban on the production of fissile material has encouraged UNIDIR to dedicate this issue of *Disarmament Forum* to that topic. Included are forward-looking appraisals written by experts on what will be key factors, topics and divisions in the negotiations. Also included in this issue is a completely updated edition of *The Fissile Material Cut-Off Debate: A Bibliographical Survey* (UNIDIR Research Report no. 38), first published in 1996. This is a useful compilation of recent articles in English and French concerning fissile materials.

In addition to this issue of *Disarmament Forum*, UNIDIR has two other forthcoming publications on the topic of fissile materials: *Fissile Material Stocks: Characteristics, Measures and Policy Options*, by William Walker and Frans Berkhout, and *Stocks of Fissile Materials for Weapons Purposes*, by Frans Berkhout. These three publications will be useful tools for those who follow or participate in the negotiations.

Sadly, the fissile material negotiations have been slow off the mark in 1999. The first session of the CD has ended with little movement on this issue. The ongoing disagreement on the most basic items — as evident in the controversy over what to call the treaty — has entrenched many divisions before the actual negotiations have even started. In this vein, we received the following poem venting one anonymous individual's frustration with disarmament negotiations getting caught up in minutiae.

A Comment on the Comma

The misuse of the humble comma
Lends license to the nuclear bomber

A comma in its proper place
Can serve to save the human race

But have you ever seen a nation
Destroy itself through punctuation

The new UNIDIR research project, *The Costs of Disarmament*, is getting underway. This year-long project will examine a few key countries as examples and carefully research what their commitments to disarmament treaties mean to them in terms of financial and resource costs. In addition, the project will try to ascertain what each country perceives are the benefits brought to them through their participation in the agreements and whether there is consensus that there is a

net gain to the state in question. The aim of the project is to achieve a better understanding of the costs and benefits of disarmament agreements with a view to assisting policy-makers to decide how money is spent on such commitments, which budget lines are best structured to handle such spending and how states could approach this aspect of negotiations in the future.

We have received a lot of positive feedback on the first issue of *Disarmament Forum*. Please feel free to send your comments or suggestions to dforum@unog.ch.

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