

Civil society including churches again denied access to disarmament forum

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“With governments spending record sums on arms, the world desperately needs a multilateral negotiating forum dedicated to disarmament,” said Peter Prove, director of the World Council of Churches (WCC) Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA).

“It used to have one, here in Geneva. It is called the United Nations Conference on Disarmament (CD) and it has just tried – for the 18th year in a row – to agree a programme of work. It has failed again, spectacularly,” said Prove following the collapse, early in the 2015 session, of concerted efforts to agree on the year’s work, civil society participation, expanding membership and repairing the CD’s chronic dysfunction.

The Geneva-based CD is the world’s only permanent multilateral disarmament negotiating forum. It was established in 1979 as a belated response to the high-stakes nuclear arms race of the Cold War. The CD’s successes include a 1996 treaty banning all nuclear tests, its last achievement to date.

Inviting civil society participation is a long-pending change at the CD that is directly relevant to churches. All civil society organizations, including the WCC, are excluded from the CD. The CD President, Ambassador Jorge Lomónaco of Mexico, presented three drafts on the topic early in the session. Many states have spoken in favour of the change over the years, yet the matter has rarely come close to a decision. In the end, the United Kingdom objected, which any state may do and thus deny the required consensus.

“Defeat came again at the hands of the few—the nine nuclear-armed states whose actions favour the unstable status quo instead of negotiating more security for everyone,” said Jonathan Frerichs, WCC programme executive for peace building and disarmament.

“The only sign of progress this year was that the case for fixing the CD was made well enough that one of the nuclear powers had to show their hand and actually block reforms,” he added.

The Ambassador of Mexico ended his reformist month as rotating CD president with a question which he said only the nuclear powers can answer: Those without the will to negotiate (about nuclear weapons) are few, he noted. What shall the rest of us do until that political will finally appears?

One answer is apparent outside the CD. With strong civil society support, including support from churches, a global majority of states is being built around the need to ban nuclear weapons on humanitarian grounds, with or without the nuclear-armed states.

[Momentum builds for ban on nuclear weapons](#) (WCC news release of 16 December 2014)

[WCC statement on the Way of Just Peace](#)

[WCC project “Churches engaged for nuclear arms control”](#)

The World Council of Churches promotes Christian unity in faith, witness and service for a just and peaceful world. An ecumenical fellowship of churches founded in 1948, by the end of 2013 the WCC had 345 member churches representing more than 500 million Christians from Protestant, Orthodox, Anglican and other traditions in over 140 countries. The WCC works cooperatively with the Roman Catholic Church. The WCC general secretary is the Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, from the [Lutheran] Church of Norway.

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