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Oral History Interview with Richard Butler

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Australian diplomat and expert involved in the 1995 Non-Proliferation Treaty Extension Conference.

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Richard Butler ☐☐
☐☐☐Australia ☐☐

Oral history interview conducted by Michal Onderco by Skype on 13 September 2018

MICHAL ONDERCO: Thanks again for finding the time to talk to me about this period. I will be asking questions in three main areas, about what happened before the conference and especially in Australia but also your cooperation with other partners. Then I want to ask questions about things that happened at the conference and then I want to talk a little bit about what happened after the conference, and your expectations about the future at that time.

I want to start with what happened before the conference, and I would like to ask you to situate Australia's thinking about the NPT on the eve of the extension.

RICHARD BUTLER: Right. That's a very good question and I could, you know, give you a quite detailed answer but I'll spare you that, I'll just make three or four points. At that time, Australia was very actively, by its own choice, it was very actively engaged in pursuing nuclear arms control, both non-proliferation and disarmament.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: It had done this for quite a number of years, I'm not precisely sure how many, but the important point is, it had done this irrespective of which of the main parties held government.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: At the time of the NPT Review and Extension Conference, the party in government was the party that I had a strong identity with, namely the Australian Labour Party, a fairly classic social democrat party...

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: ...who had appointed me previously for five years as Ambassador for Disarmament based in Geneva. And then when that appointment finished, they moved me to another post. I was sent to Thailand where I negotiated the Cambodia peace agreement which was based on an Australian text.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: And then that wound up... well, I had been to Bangkok before and I had been ambassador to Cambodia, but when that finished I was sent to New York where I became permanent representative to the UN. The point I want to make is that even though it was obvious for a Labour government to be very much in favor of nuclear arms control, it is the case that the previous government from the other side, the conservative side of politics which oddly enough is actually called the Australian Liberal, the Liberal Party of Australia, it's not liberal, it's conservative. They too, under a couple of foreign ministers and a prime minister had also been committed to nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament.

One of the fundamental reasons for this was that Australian people were very aware of nuclear weapons because nuclear testing had been conducted in Australia by the British with our permission.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: In the central Australian desert, they had tested nuclear explosive devices a number of times and it had done damage to Australians both indigenous and European, more recent, Australians.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: And that was quite an issue. But also we have then, and have still now, but we had then a very substantial supply of uranium in our soil.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: In fact there was a time, and I don't think it's probably the case now, where we had possibly the largest known deposits of uranium in the world and people were also aware of that. And while I was Ambassador for Disarmament, there arose in Australia a vast public debate, and I don't want to exaggerate, there was a really large public debate on the uranium question. Should we export our uranium or not? Would it end up in other people's nuclear weapons?

And I was charged by the government to lead that debate within Australia as well as my international duties which were to represent Australia on all arms control and disarmament issues anywhere in the world, but I was then based in Geneva.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: But I would return frequently to Australia to stand with the Labour minister involved in lots of public meetings around the country, including in parts of the country where uranium mining was taking place.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: And one of the things the Labour party offered the people was this, the assurance that: one, we would pursue active arms control and disarmament policies.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: The wider environment, and two, we would adopt Australian national safeguards which would mean that we would only ever sell our uranium for peaceful purposes, we would say that not one gram of it would end up in anyone's nuclear weapons. And that was a policy that essentially both parties supported even though there was unrest on the conservative side because as ever there were business people in support of the party who wanted to make the money out of selling uranium to anybody. And they would argue that if we didn't sell it someone else would, and so on.

So the constituency within Australia that I represented was strongly in support of nuclear arms control, and that was increased by the way by the fact that the French were testing nuclear weapons at Moruroa Atoll, in the Pacific, in French Tahiti. And there was very deep concern about that also in Australia.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: So, I had taken part in three review conferences of NPT and I led the delegation at two of them, but this was kind of the height of my career. And by the way it was under this current, the then-current Labour government that the Labour prime minister became so concerned about the nuclear arms race, and I mean that specifically, the nuclear arms race between Russia, the Soviet Union and the United States, that he created a thing called the Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: Which put together 16 international experts in the field, and I was made chair of it. And we met for a year and produced a report on what practical steps might be taken towards eliminating nuclear weapons.

MICHAL ONDERCO: But the Canberra commission came only after the extension, right? It was established, I think, in November '95.

RICHARD BUTLER: Yeah, no, I think it was just before that.

MICHAL ONDERCO: But...

RICHARD BUTLER: I'd have to check, I'll check those dates, but it was quite close to...but I'm sorry for the length of that answer, but as I said I could make it even longer, but I guess to sum it up the point I'm making is that, irrespective of which major party, left of center or right of center, was in power in Australia, there was a deep constituency in Australia for pursuing measures of nuclear arms control and disarmament-both.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: One other thing I want to mention, in the first section, Australia's preparations, a very important decision was taken in Canberra before the Review and Extension Conference took place. And that was Canberra formed the view that crucial to the success of the conference would be the position of Israel.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: And not simply because of the United States' support for Israel and its clandestine nuclear weapons capability. That's an issue which I have argued elsewhere in my writings and so on has always stalked the NPT. But there's this, to use the cliché, there's always been this elephant or rhinoceros in the room, whatever you want to call it.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: Which was the state was widely understood to have nuclear weapons, but which it had never confirmed or denied...

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: ...outside the Treaty but which was always going to be protected by the United States. And of course that was deeply upsetting to Arab states but also to a lot of other non-aligned states. We formed from our research and discussions and I guess some intelligence reports, we formed the view that one of the most likely

factors that could blow the 1995 conference apart, I shouldn't use those words when talking about nuclear weapons, but could break it, was the stance of Israel.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: So a decision was taken that we might try to do something about it. And given that how activist we were in the whole field of nuclear arms control, we didn't just think about it, we saw for ourselves, which is why we had an Ambassador for Disarmament which I had been previously for five [years], and we were, it was only one other country that had one of those and that was Mexico.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: In the person of very famous Alfonso Garcia Robles who won the Nobel Prize for nuclear arms control and the Treaty of Tlatelolco. We instituted this concept of an ambassador for a subject, for disarmament, we were then followed and so there must be 30 or 40 of them in the world now, but I was the first for Australia and one of the first in the world.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: So we had an activist attitude towards this, and Canberra took a decision that we should ourselves go and speak to Israel about what role it thought it might play...

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: ...at the conference. So I went to Jerusalem, as accompanied by a senior official from the Department of Foreign Affairs, and we spent two days there in talks with the Israelis and I can be very economical about that. We had no illusion that they would make everything better by signing the Treaty or joining it, that always would have raised the problem on what basis would they join it as a non-nuclear weapons state or would they declare that they had nuclear state capability and join as a nuclear weapon state, which many were reluctant to have them do anyway.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: But we had no illusions about whether or not they would join the Treaty. But what I did was I sought from them an undertaking that they would not seek to harm the Treaty while we were considering its review and extension. That they would have a hands off policy, they would not throw any rocks at the Treaty from the sidelines while we were doing our work.

And they agreed to that and they went one step further and agreed to make a statement at the beginning of the conference which they would issue publicly in which they would say that they strongly supported the goals and objectives of the Treaty. And we got that, and indeed they issued that statement, that they meant it no harm, they supported its goals and objectives but they for their reasons did not feel that at this stage they could join it.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: And that was a significant event, a significant statement and that was an achievement of, maybe others were talking to them too, but that was an

achievement of our direct diplomacy by going there and talking to them about this and they [inaudible] and they made that statement.

MICHAL ONDERCO: I want to come back to the issue you mentioned that in Australia there was this commitment to nuclear arms control. Was that translated to the support or the indefinite extension of the Treaty automatically, or was there a debate about whether Australia should support only one-off or a rolling extension of the Treaty?

RICHARD BUTLER: We wanted to see the Treaty extended indefinitely. And I remember making it clear in statements and so on that any, and this is very difficult with some of the Arab countries, Egypt in particular, that any qualified extension would simply postpone the pain and the problem to another day and I also said repeatedly and it was the position of the Australian government which was you do not qualify absolute objectives and principles as those that are found in NPT.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: I very often made the argument that NPT effectively had the status of an addendum or attachment to or extension of the Charter of the United Nations. I made the point that the Charter of the United Nations didn't refer to atomic weapons because they were only coming into existence when the San Francisco conference was taking place.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: Shortly afterwards, and the only reference in the Charter to arms control is there's only one sentence that refers to plans for the regulation of armaments...

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: ...which the UN was to draw up. But shortly afterwards at the first meeting of the General Assembly in London in 1946, six months after the Charter came into existence, the first resolution adopted by the General Assembly was on nuclear disarmament-resolution GA number one...

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: ...is on atomic weapons. And I would make the point that just as the Charter is supplement by the Universal Declaration on Human Rights for example, which also came shortly after the charter came into existence, that the NPT should be seen as being basically of constitutional status as well.

Because it's essential assertion-I've said this over and over again a million times in my life-the essential principle enshrined in NPT is that no one should have nuclear weapons, no one.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: Because for those who do not have them, it incorporates the pledge that they must never and will never get them, and for those that do have them, it incorporates the undertaking that they will progressively get rid of them. And I will argue that the core of NPT is the perspective, is the view, that these weapons are so awful, so contrary to what the Charter stands for and the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights stands for, that the core of NPT is the proposition that no one should have nuclear weapons.

And I would then argue, by extension, that you don't give a qualified extension to that principle. That principle is absolute.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah, but the...

RICHARD BUTLER: And it should be permanent. Now the text of the Treaty regarding how this is carried out and what obligations individual states have could always been the subject of revisiting and amendment, there's a process for amendment of the Treaty and so if that was considered desirable at a certain stage. But I could see nowhere the possibility that NPT, that the core goal of NPT, to achieve a world without nuclear weapons, the idea that no one should in fact have these weapons, would ever be modified.

And it made no logical sense to extend only temporarily such a principle. And so we went to New York firm in the view that the Treaty should be extended and it should be extended indefinitely. The question of how that would be achieved I'm sure we'll be talking about in a moment. That became a very, very serious point. But that was our view.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Before we go on, I want to ask two more questions. One is related to Australia's cooperation at that time with other countries. How was your cooperation in the run up to the conference on the issue of extension with other Western countries but also in the region of the Asia Pacific?

RICHARD BUTLER: Well, Australia caucused at the UN, including for this special conference, in the Western European and Others Group.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: And we had major relationships there, not least with the three western Nuclear Weapons States. We also had important relationships with countries from the Non-Aligned Movement or the Non-Aligned group but in particular countries from the Asia-Pacific region.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: And we were all in frequent, and good contact with all of them. We had difficulties within the Western Group, which I'm sure we'll come to talk about. Because the Western Group's deliberations on the issues were very often dominated by the nuclear weapons states. And we had very great difficulty with that, we thought that they were not acting in terms of the real spirit of the Treaty by insisting on their interests and the Article VI of the Treaty.

But the short answer to your question is that we had continual and detailed relationships but within our own political caucus group and with other countries, especially major countries from Asia-Pacific, Japan for example, Indonesia...

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: ...and the Non-Aligned Movement. And we had a very important relationship with Egypt.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah. Many of these countries were opposed to the indefinite

extension of the Treaty, for example Indonesia was opposed.

RICHARD BUTLER: Yes.

MICHAL ONDERCO: There were some who say that Japan was very hesitant to support indefinite extension of the Treaty. Egypt was opposed to the indefinite extension of the Treaty. Were there attempts to persuade these countries to come to your side?

RICHARD BUTLER: Yes there were. We moved away from Australian policy into the next category?

MICHAL ONDERCO: Well, I have one more question about Australian policy but I want to ask still about the sort of domestic input. So whether there was Parliament involved and whether civil society was somehow involved in the run up.

RICHARD BUTLER: Parliament was not so involved, the government was heavily involved, of course.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: But there was intense interest in the conference and in what we were doing on the part of NGO's, non-governmental organizations and [inaudible], which there were a number of them, they were strong, they were strongly supported. They sent representatives to New York to follow the proceedings, and I was in frequent and continual contact with them.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah. Before we go on, I sort of want to see whether the bigger international context influenced your calculations. And many of the interviewees for example mentioned that a thing that sort of mattered strongly for the government's thinking about the NPT was the end of the Cold War and the end of superpower competition. And that this made some governments more willing to support indefinite extension. Was it also the calculation on the part of the Australian government?

RICHARD BUTLER: Yes, I mean, at the end of the Cold War...

[THE CONNECTION BREAKS OFF HERE, AND CONTINUES AS A NEW CALL]

RICHARD BUTLER: Sorry, you're back?

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes, I'm back, I'm sorry. So you said, and we ended up with the end of the Cold War.

RICHARD BUTLER: Yeah, well there was some optimism in the world in those first three years after the end of the Cold War. One of the dividends of the end, the cessation of that competition, would be significant progress in the reduction of the number and quality of nuclear weapons that were held in the world.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: And you know there was a spirit in the conference that said "all that's over, these weapons aren't necessary anymore" and certainly not the hundreds that were accumulated.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: Fully aware of those numbers, at the height of the Cold War there were some 80,000 nuclear weapons in the world.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: They'd been greatly reduced now.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: But there was optimism really significant progress could be made towards nuclear disarmament. And yeah, there was, there was optimism about that, that was a factor.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah. So let's talk more towards the sort of run up to the conference and Australia's interaction with other actors. You already hinted that the cooperation between, within the WEOG (Western European and Others Group) was very different, difficult.

RICHARD BUTLER: Yes.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Can you tell me more about that?

RICHARD BUTLER: Yes, I can and in some ways, in some ways this was a central part of the story that I can tell you I think. Right at the beginning of the conference there was a high level meeting of the Western Group. And I think, actually I think it was held in our mission, I think the one I'm thinking of was actually at the conference table in the Australian mission, I don't know why that would have been the case but it was.

And at that meeting, the United States delegation produced a surprise. It tabled at the meeting the text of a pledge. Have you heard about this?

MICHAL ONDERCO: No.

RICHARD BUTLER: Ah that's really interesting.

MICHAL ONDERCO: When was this?

RICHARD BUTLER: Right at the beginning of the conference, maybe a day or a few days before it was opened.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Okay.

RICHARD BUTLER: There was a caucus meeting where the leaders of delegations of the Western Group came around the conference table, and at that meeting the United States unveiled, put on the table, it's plan for the signature, the swearing of a pledge by all members of the Western Group, that they would support indefinite extension...

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: ...under all circumstances. And that they would go out around the conference and actively sell this idea to others, especially the major Non-Aligned countries, again Egypt comes to mind.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Okay.

RICHARD BUTLER: And that they, they would pledge to accept nothing other, no temporary extension, no qualified extension...

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: ...that they would accept nothing other than indefinite extension without conditions.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: And...

MICHAL ONDERCO: And that was a different thing than the resolution that was proposed later, that the Canadians collected signatures for?

RICHARD BUTLER: Ah, yeah, the Canadians. Maybe it was the same thing, maybe it was put into a formal resolution.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: This is the kind of detail that I'd have to look up, it escapes my memory. But there was a pledge.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: It reminded me, there was a kind of religious quality to it, "decide for Christ", you know?

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: It really was and what I think of that is I don't know what it was like in Slovakia in the old days but demonstrating when I was growing up was a fair sized population in Australia of Irish origin, who were overwhelmingly Roman Catholic and very often largely supporters of the Labour Party. But within Irish based Roman Catholic circles in Australia for a number of years, there was a thing, and it was just called The Pledge.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: This was something that people would pledge to do for all of their life which was never drink a drop of alcohol.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Okay.

RICHARD BUTLER: There was even a lapel badge that people would wear, I forget what symbol it had on it, but that showed that you had taken that pledge, that you

would never drink a drop of that wicked substance.

MICHAL ONDERCO: That would never fly in Slovakia.

RICHARD BUTLER: No. It was a very Irish thing. And when the United States delegate put this thing on the table, I immediately thought of The Pledge in Catholic circles in Australia. You know, a high minded aspirational thing and you wore a badge to demonstrate that you'd done it. It was absolute, and so on.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: And I thought, "My god they're behaving like Tammany Hall." You know Tammany Hall?

MICHAL ONDERCO: No.

RICHARD BUTLER: Tammany Hall was a meeting hall in New York City which in the early 20th century was the headquarters of the labor unions.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Okay.

RICHARD BUTLER: It gave rise to a term in American politics called Tammany Hall, you know behaving like Tammany Hall, which meant strong arm, bullying tactics to ensure that everyone toed the same political line. Very often there was corruption involved, it was in support of the Democratic Party. It's just, you get in the English language in America now, people will say "oh, he's employing Tammany Hall tactics". Tammany Hall tactics suggests threatening...

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: ...violence to get people to agree with you, beating up people, rigging a ballot in a union ballot, rigging the ballot, that's Tammany Hall. And I thought this is like The Pledge in Irish Catholic circles in Australia, it's Tammany Hall tactics in America, twisting people's arms. [clearing throat] Excuse me.

The United States representative demanded [clearing throat] excuse me, as a method of loyalty, every member of the Western Group should make this undertaking, should sign this, maybe it was a resolution...

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: ...but should sign this undertaking, that the Treaty would be extended indefinitely without qualification or concession on any other point...

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: ...no matter what happened in the conference. And as this was going around the table, and obviously there'd been some preparation for this I suppose. As it went around the table, oh and it was made clear that this would be tabled in the conference on day one.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: It was made clear. Most delegates around the table said yes, we agree, we'll do that. We'll take The Pledge, we're on board, you can count us in.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: And when it came to me, I refused. This was a dramatic moment. I said "Under no circumstances will I take part in this".

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: I said it is not because Australia does not support indefinite extension, we do. It's rather because we want it to succeed that I refuse to do this.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: Because what you're doing is going in Day One to this conference and handing all of your other colleagues, especially from the developing countries, who have grave concerns about things like Israel's nuclear weapons, like the fact that there's been inadequate progress under Article VI of the Treaty in nuclear disarmament. You're going, you're saying to everyone "we don't give a damn what you say or what you try to achieve, we don't even want to hear what you have to say because you see, we've made up our mind and it's this or nothing."

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: And I said, I said "Australia will not participate in this. It will be held to be deeply offensive to other countries to want this done before you've even heard them open their mouth." I remember saying that, before you've even heard one speech, one statement, seen one document. And I said "no, we will not participate in that." Now, that caused a problem obviously. People were disturbed, there was no unity as a consequence. I can't remember if anyone else was brave enough to say the same. I think they're not noted for their bravery, I think they probably didn't but some remained silent. But the Canadian delegate agreed to take up the task of coordinating the effort of walking The Pledge...

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: ...around the conference to all delegates to get them to sign up as well. And this poor man, I remember him well, he was pressed into this role. I think he actually thought it would get him future favor if he carried out this job you know, a new appointment or ambassadorship or something.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: But whether that's true or not, this Canadian delegate said he would take up with enthusiasm the role of walking The Pledge around the conference and getting as many signatures on it as he could. What then happened to me was that the United States made representations-urgent representations-in my capital...

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: ...against what I had done, demanding to know if this was Australian policy or was I just simply behaving as a maverick on my own decision.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: And the message came back to me and to the United States saying "Ambassador Butler has our full confidence and he is implementing Australian policy". That came from the Australian minister of foreign affairs. He said "you go for it and you do what you're doing. Because it is outrageous that these people are seeking to bully everyone into submission before they've even heard anyone's statements." The question becomes "well why have the conference at all?"

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: Which is, if this is what it was to be like. And I was not the most loved character around the U.S. delegation at that stage. The Canadian went off and started to collect signatures. And when he reported back to Western Group meetings, he wasn't doing very well. There were a lot of countries who said you know, "Goodness heavens no, you're asking us to sign up for this before the meeting has even started, before we've even had a debate, we had working groups and things to discuss. Under no circumstances."

So The Pledge didn't do very well. So, that was the first major interaction between Australia and its western colleagues. The conference then went ahead and there was very substantial concerns that you probably know, about Article VI.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: That is universal membership of the Treaty, it was called, we want this Treaty to be universal.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: And that means India, Pakistan, and Israel need to join it. We want to see progress on Article VI, we want to see real, serious plans for reducing the number of nuclear weapons in the world. And so it got underway in exactly the way that one would have expected it to get underway.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: With [inaudible] and the conference went ahead. And that produced documents from working groups that set out a future program of work, future measures of disarmament and so on, you're probably aware of those documents.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes. But, before we go on and talk about it, when I spoke to the Canadian Ambassador, he said that he remembered that you returned for consultations back to Canberra a week into the conference. Is that correct?

RICHARD BUTLER: No, completely untrue.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Okay.

RICHARD BUTLER: No, I never did. The matter of dispute in the Western Group was referred to Canberra.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: Was considered at a high level, and, the Minister of Foreign Affairs personally told the Americans to bugger off, that Butler was carrying out our policy, and that they should calm down and let the conference do its work.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: Yeah, is it interesting how myths get authored. What the Canadian told you was absolutely false, I went nowhere, I stayed in New York the whole of the time.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Okay. So you mentioned a lot of times the Non-Aligned countries. Can you tell me more about your interactions with the Non-Aligned, and especially since a lot of the work of the Western Group was aimed at persuading the key non-aligns to go towards indefinite extension.

RICHARD BUTLER: Yeah. And now Michal, there's a lot of detail here which I'd have to look up, I don't remember...

MICHAL ONDERCO: Okay.

RICHARD BUTLER: ...but I do remember, I do remember a central thing of very, very great importance. The Australian government had drawn up several papers to do with the various-the work of-the various committees...

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: ...of the conference, and the key issues like nuclear disarmament, indefinite extension, and a future work program of steps including trying to make the Treaty universally accepted...

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: ...steps that should be taken after the conference to ensure the more effective implementation of NPT. To sum it up.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: There are things that quite, so many papers were out there of individual states and groups, outlining the steps that they thought would be required to make the NPT stronger and be more effectively implemented.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: And we had drawn up some such papers. We had discussed them with some others, they had the blessing of Canberra. And I put to Canberra a way of proceeding which they agreed to, and this is what we did. We gave those papers to the South African delegation.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: Because we believed that South Africa was then, wouldn't be the case today, they're in much worse shape today, but we believed they were in excellent shape then. They had recently got rid of apartheid. They had a

democratically elected government, it was known that they had created some nuclear weapons and then was the only country in the world to have disassembled and destroyed them. They had a reputation that was almost second to none...

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: ...in the Non-Aligned world. We had obviously extensive talks with the South Africans and we didn't want any pride of authorship or recognition here, we wanted an effective conference. And so Canberra agreed to the proposition that we would simply give these to the South Africans privately.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: And that they could promote them, they would introduce them in the various committees, they would speak up for them, they would work for their adoption and we would come in behind them and strongly support them. But these would be South African initiatives, and that's what happened.

MICHAL ONDERCO: And that happened right before the conference or was that sort of a more long term type of a cooperation?

RICHARD BUTLER: It really happened, if I recall correctly, it happened right at the beginning of the conference.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Okay.

RICHARD BUTLER: Maybe a week before, but right at the beginning of the conference these steps were taken.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: They were taken after my visit to Israel.

MICHAL ONDERCO: So did you, at that time, do you remember your interlocutors on the South African end at that time?

RICHARD BUTLER: Yeah, I remember two, there was that, now I can't remember their names but we'll identify them in a moment. Jean duPreez was one.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: He was a white South African.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: Of Dutch origin who was I think number two or number three in their delegation. He subsequently joined the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty organization in Vienna.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: Do you know his name?

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes, Jean duPreez.

RICHARD BUTLER: Jean duPreez,. And the other was the head of their delegation, he was a South African actually of Indian original, do you know his name?

MICHAL ONDERCO: Do you mean Abdul Minty?

RICHARD BUTLER: Yeah, yeah.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Okay.

RICHARD BUTLER: Abdul.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Okay.

RICHARD BUTLER: They were the two people I dealt with mainly. How do you spell his family name? Minty?

MICHAL ONDERCO: Minty.

RICHARD BUTLER: M-I-N-T-Y.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Exactly.

RICHARD BUTLER: Abdul Minty. He subsequently became head of all of those things in the South African foreign ministry and then I saw him in Pretoria a few years ago and he was about to go off to Geneva as South African ambassador...

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: ...to the UN in Geneva. Is he still there?

MICHAL ONDERCO: No, he retired recently.

RICHARD BUTLER: Yeah.

MICHAL ONDERCO: And he's now, I think, enjoying the retirement.

RICHARD BUTLER: Abdul and Jean.

MICHAL ONDERCO: And so how did you see the discussion going in these first weeks? Because you said that you know things weren't going all that well for The Pledge. So what was your calculation in these first days of the conference? Did you think that the Treaty was going to be extended indefinitely or-what were your expectations?

RICHARD BUTLER: Two things. It was in great difficulty, in great difficulty. In particular around the issue of Israel.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: The Egyptians in particular and a lot of Arabs with them and

Africans, North Africans with them, they were incredibly unhappy with the idea that the status quo would simply continue.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: The Pledge of course was not going well, and I said two things. One is that there was significant unhappiness about The Pledge and about the stance of the nuclear weapons states, there was quite some anger about it and in particular the issue of Israel. And the second thing, back to The Pledge, the second thing was that I and Canberra felt absolutely justified in the stance that I had taken at that first Western Group meeting.

They felt absolutely justified that the pledge had been stupid idea that gave great offense, and actually held the prospect of making the whole conference collapse. And remember, I think the previous conference in 1990 had ended without a final document.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: And you know we felt, we felt that this was a bullying idea, it was really bad and we felt very glad that we had nothing to do with it. And I think too we thought that the decision to hand over our proposals to South Africa was a clever one.

MICHAL ONDERCO: So if the resolution wasn't really the right way to do, what was the preference on the Canadian end to decide about the extension? Were you in favor of voting or were you in favor of-what were you in favor of?

RICHARD BUTLER: I can't recall, but the United States of course wanted it to be done without a vote...

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: ...by consensus. I don't know how the Canadians felt about the job they were carrying out. I mean, yeah I remember the man involved, again who's name I forget, he was a slightly nervous character but I remember him coming to some Western Group meetings and almost in tears just saying he was having a terrible time, it was an awful job they'd given him and it was not going well, he was really, I remember a couple of conversations with him personally where he was almost crying on my shoulder saying "Richard this is dreadful, it's awful," and actually whispering to me that the Americans had made a great mistake, but he was obliged to carry out what he had to do. I think the conference was three weeks, wasn't it?

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: Yeah, the first two weeks were bloody. They really were bloody and contentious. And no one could see the light at the end of the tunnel. The South African proposals improved increasingly got favor. There was an increasing emergence of a future work program document. You know, the various documents, I'd have to go back and look at the record to see what were adopted. There were two main documents wasn't there, apart from extension there was a program of work and some statement of principles, wasn't there?

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes. Well, there was Principles & Objectives and the other one is about the future of the review process document.

RICHARD BUTLER: Yeah, well those documents were starting to come together.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: And again I keep, I don't meant to blow my own trumpet, but very much as a result of the South African work, they did great work, Jean duPreez did fantastic work, Abdul Minty was much respected. The documents were good; people were coming closer and closer to agreement on those. But there was still this elephant in the room that was Israel. There was still the problem of what to do about extension and whether there would be a vote or not.

The Egyptians in particular wanted an extension for 10 years, didn't they? For two more review conferences and if nothing, or was it only one? If nothing had happened in nuclear disarmament after one or two more extension conferences they were mumbling about just leaving the Treaty, forgetting it.

MICHAL ONDERCO: During the conference, the conference chair Jayantha Dhanapala composed this small group of ambassadors call the "friends of the president" where a lot of the substantive negotiations were going on. I presume Australia was a member of it, right?

RICHARD BUTLER: Yes, absolutely. Jayantha and I were very close personally, we first met each other when we were 24, 25 years of age.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Oh, okay.

RICHARD BUTLER: In a diplomatic training course that was given to recruits in the foreign service in Canberra and an equal number of people who were going from our region.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Okay.

RICHARD BUTLER: And two young officers were sent from Sri Lanka and Jayantha was one of them so he and I went through the Australia Department of Foreign Affairs diplomatic training course together...

MICHAL ONDERCO: Oh, okay.

RICHARD BUTLER: ...when we were 22, 23, 24 years of age, something like that. So we'd known each other all that time.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: I was in the group. I also spoke a lot with Jayantha on a one to one basis.

MICHAL ONDERCO: So if there was a lot of opposition against the indefinite extension and there was a lot of hesitation from the part of the Non-Aligned, what do you see as the key element that managed to sort of take them onboard towards supporting the indefinite extension?

RICHARD BUTLER: Did Jayantha tell you about the meeting that was held on the last night in my residence?

MICHAL ONDERCO: Well everyone mentions that there was a meeting at your residence, but nobody really mentions what was happening at it.

RICHARD BUTLER: Well, you see Jayantha had the friends of the chair group, of which he was doing a very good job, and progress was going well and I'm going to tell you something now which I can say after all these years, which is pretty outrageous, but I mention in the book that I wrote, I mentioned in the book at the beginning of this conversation.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: I said that nothing concentrates the minds of nuclear weapons states more than the prospect someone might want to take their adult toys away from them. And what they did as a consequence was the United States, France, the United Kingdom, and Russia, and China in Asia, intelligence resources to New York for the period of the conference...

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: ...to keep track of what everyone was saying and doing. And I know that they were listening to my conversations electronically and possibly reading some of my written messages because they made the mistake on two occasions of revealing to me things that I had said, including a conversation that I had with Jayantha, which they could only have learned as a result of spying on me and him.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: Did you know about that?

MICHAL ONDERCO: Well, I heard these allegations but of course when you ask about them in the United States and in the UK they would deny that something like that happened.

RICHARD BUTLER: Right. There was one conversation that I had with Jayantha particularly in which some things were said about the way ahead, some proposals made, which came back to me from the United States and I think the United Kingdom as well.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Okay.

RICHARD BUTLER: And the only way that they could have had that information was through electronic eavesdropping or penetration of cable messages by me and/or Jayantha.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: It was perfect proof that we were under their surveillance. But Jayantha was making good progress, reasonable progress with the friends of the chair, but it needed to be put together...

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: ...in particular the question of indefinite extension. And the way it was put together, and I can't remember precisely how this came about. Oh, and I

should say Indonesia was very important. I was in contact with the highest level in Indonesia.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: I happened to know the foreign minister of Indonesia personally. And in one stage there was an exchange between him and me where consideration was given to him jumping on a plane and flying to New York and making a personal appearance to help solve the problems.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: But how this came together in the end is the proposition was put to me. I think possibly, I don't know why, possibly because of the role I'd played with the test ban negotiations but you know I don't need to go into that autobiographical stuff...

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: ...but just the fact that the proposition was put to me that I might hold one of my private meetings in my residence at Nr 1 Beekman Place, the Australian residence since 1948 where I lived.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: It had a large dining room and sitting. And pull together a group of people who might reach agreement.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: And we did, I did. I called a dinner, I held a dinner on two nights before the last day.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: Because that 24 hours is always too quiet for the preparing of the documents.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: So two nights before the last day, I held a dinner for 16 people. And that included the leadership of the Non-Aligned Movement including the Egyptian Ambassador, who went on to become the Egyptian foreign minister. And there were two Egyptians I think, Nabil El-Araby, and the one who became foreign minister and ran for president, what was his name? He was head of the Arab League.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Oh, yeah, his name escapes me as well.

RICHARD BUTLER: It will come back to me, I knew him very well. And the representative of the United States, the weapon states, United Kingdom, France I think. Maybe Russia, I don't think China because it was believed that China would simply go ahead with what Russia agreed to, go along with what Russia agreed to. China was not a significant player.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: And leading Africans. I couldn't quite reconstruct the 16 of them but I think it was four from, I think it was three groups-weapon states, western, Non-Aligned, and others.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: Three times four, no four times four. Sixteen, there were 16. So we had dinner around the dining table where of course discussion took place amongst the 16. And then we went to the sitting room, and sat around in a big circle with coffee tables and coffee and so on. And we went on until two o'clock in the morning. And the package of documents was agreed to in that meeting.

It was agreed that Jayantha Dhanapala as President of the conference would announce from the podium that there had been an agreement reached on these, this work program, the document of Principles, guidelines and principles, and on indefinite extension of the Treaty without a vote.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: And to all of which would be adopted by consensus. And that was agreed on at that meeting in my apartment and [was] sent off for printing and translation the next day. And then the following day, in the afternoon or evening I think it was, the plenary was convened and that action duly took place.

And if you look at those documents, the guidelines and principles in particular I guess, they illustrate the concerns that had been discussed, some of the concerns that were reflected, some but more diplomatically than others, but some people had to hold their nose-the Egyptians did. The Americans wanted it to be easier than that. The Pledge sort of disappeared into the background somewhere. But that's how it was done, it was done, over six hours or so, at my residence that night.

MICHAL ONDERCO: But by that time...by that time the Canadian resolution had over 100 signatures, so it was clear that if there would be a vote it would be carried.

RICHARD BUTLER: Yeah, but I don't think it was every put was it?

MICHAL ONDERCO: Well, it was never put to the vote but there was 100 countries that were signed under it.

RICHARD BUTLER: Yeah, but was it adopted?

MICHAL ONDERCO: Well, no it wasn't, because there was no voting on it.

RICHARD BUTLER: That's what I said, it was never put for adoption I think.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: So the best thing you could say about it was that it was a sign to others of where things would ultimately go. But the better way ahead was by consensus because had it been by a vote I think some countries would have voted against that, and therefore might have considered leaving the Treaty.

MICHAL ONDERCO: How did you, I will come back to this point, but I want to ask, how did you see your cooperation with other members of the WEOG who were not a nuclear weapons states? So for example how did you see your cooperation with Germany, Italy, Netherlands, and others?

RICHARD BUTLER: Well, they're all different. [clears throat] Excuse me. It was quite a spectrum. I remember for example, when I at that first meeting of the group, the Western Group...

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: ...when I said that Australia would have nothing to do with this Pledge, would not sign it, would have nothing to do with.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: And I expressed my strong view that it was outrageously disrespectful to our Treaty partners who hadn't even been heard. You should put it in your pockets and do nothing for a week or two until you've had a chance to hear what concerns would be expressed by those countries. A country that expressed strong support for the U.S. approach and was very unhappy with me was Belgium.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Okay.

RICHARD BUTLER: And I think I could fairly say that the spectrum within the Western Group was shaped by the attitude that each individual government had towards the United States conduct and its relationship with the United States. Belgium at that stage felt that it was a complete clone of the United States on these issues, that it lived under the U.S. nuclear umbrella in Europe and maybe because NATO headquarters was in Belgium, I don't know.

But they were very angry with me. And then bigger Western countries like you mentioned Germany, I think Germany was obviously in favor of indefinite extension but I don't remember Germany being so supine towards the United States. But it varied depending on who you talked to, as I said the Canadian who had this awful job would whisper to me privately that it was an awful job and he wished he didn't have to do it and so on.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: He wanted to walk both sides of the street, really. But down the other end of the spectrum you had countries like New Zealand, New Zealand has always been very anti-nuclear weapons.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: And there are some Western countries who had the sort of approach that we had and there were others that were, the only question they'd ever asked the United States, when it said "jump" was the question "how high?" So there was a spectrum.

MICHAL ONDERCO: And on this spectrum, did you see a lot of divergence between what people felt privately and what were their public statements made by the governments?

RICHARD BUTLER: Well, you've asked me a question, say that again, the sound broke up a little bit. You were asking me about the distinction between public and private statements?

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes, and about the fact whether there were any of the diplomats from the Western Group that were privately skeptical of the preferences of their governments.

RICHARD BUTLER: Ah, yeah, I mean honestly Michal, I'm not sure how useful a question that is because one of the characteristics of diplomacy, and it's not a lovely one, it's one that I always had difficulty with as others will tell you, I was not considered to be a normal diplomat, is that it's such a shabby business. It's shabby, shabby business where people will tell you one thing to your face and go away and do another. And the next person that they speak to, say another thing to that person. I mean, diplomacy is filled with dissembling and straight out lying, you know?

MICHAL ONDERCO: Right.

RICHARD BUTLER: Now, there is such a thing as national interest and I fully understand and accept that. In the UN context, there's also the fact that all states, members of the United Nations have pledged to conduct themselves in accordance with certain principles.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: And we see that under enormous pressure today. I mean the breakdown that we have on our hands today, not just because of Trump and other populist movements, but there is a clear breakdown taking place in the willingness of countries to adhere to their obligations under the Charter and revert instead to international politics being determined by national interest and power.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: Where that will lead, I'm not sure. We did have a very long period, where countries in a whole range of ways subjected, what they might have identified initially as their narrow national interest to the collective will of playing by certain rules and principles that could be found in the Charter of the UN, one of which is cooperation. I mean one of the least referred to principles of the Charter is the pledge to cooperate and conduct peaceful and cooperative international relations for the greater good.

Now, that's gone in large measure today and largely because of the conduct of the great powers in the Security Council. The Security Council is a mess, it's in very serious difficulty. And you know you witness things today like the great big Russia/Chinese military exercise that is taking place now. That looks awfully like something we were accustomed to in the 19th century before the First World War. What is that about? Who is supposed to take notice of that?

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: Haven't the Russians got 300,000 troops in the field exercising today, with some Chinese participation and 30,000 Russian tanks? Now what's that about? So you know, even then, in 1995-what am I trying to say--diplomacy has always been characterized by a lot of deviousness, saying one thing to one person and the diametric opposite five minutes later to another person.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: But there was also around the UN, and around the Treaty like NPT, there was also a fair amount of attachment to certain basic principles of cooperation and in the case of the Treaty to undertaking the spirit the Treaty. That's why there's so much difficulty with Article VI. The United States and other nuclear weapons states, France in particular, and the UK, Russia of course, will argue that there have been a lot of progress under Article VI since it was brought into existence.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: The Treaty was brought in 1968, [50] years of it now. And they're right, the number of nuclear weapons reached 80,000, it's now down to about 30,000. And so there has been progress. And Article VI is written very badly, because it makes it all dependent upon the bringing into existence of a treaty on general and complete disarmament. And that's a problem. Because that Treaty is a distant dream.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: And so, what am I trying to say.

MICHAL ONDERCO: I want to ask one more thing which is you mention a lot the relation, the status of Israel and how that mattered for the extension of the Treaty. However I would like to ask: there were also other countries that were outside of the Treaty at that time, there was of course India and Pakistan. But also countries like Brazil, outside of the Treaty, still at that time. How are these countries sort of, were they relevant for the extension of the Treaty or were they a matter of discussion?

RICHARD BUTLER: Did you say Brazil?

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes, Brazil was still outside of the Treaty at that time.

RICHARD BUTLER: Goodness me, I'd forgotten that.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: How interesting. Why, are you sure of that?

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes, Brazil joined only in 1998.

RICHARD BUTLER: When did they sign?

MICHAL ONDERCO: 1998.

RICHARD BUTLER: Oh, and then they became holier than the pope.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: Then they became under the guidance of Celso Amorim.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: They became totally devoted to nuclear disarmament. You've got to remember, disarmament generally, but nuclear disarmament in particular, is a very, very tense and difficult area.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: People tend to believe in nuclear weapons and the absurd belief that nuclear deterrence will save them, that their weapons will keep them safe. No one seems to have heard about the Thucydides trap. But, and there's an old saying that you know "disarmament is a great idea, for the other fellow." Did you understand what I just said?

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes, you said disarmament is a great idea for the other fellow.

RICHARD BUTLER: Yes. And it's a very, very difficult and contentious area, always has been and maybe it always will be. And it is a game that, the point I made in my book, the game that, in the case of nuclear weapons, is played as hard as is possible.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: That game in which it's not intended to take any prisoners whatsoever. Countries are threatened by the big powers, their aid programs are threatened, their relationship is threatened. There are lots and lots of evidence of big nuclear states saying to smaller countries "we give you five hundred million dollars a year in aid, and we want you to do this on the nuclear non-proliferation Treaty, get off our case on nuclear disarmament, we're doing the best we can. And if you don't, well you know, I don't know that we can guarantee that the aid budget will get through the Parliament or the Congress in the future if you seem to be you know obstructing us on these important matters to our national security."

So it's played as hard as possible. As a consequence, the agreements that were reached in 1995 were really significant. They were hard fought; it was not evident that it was going to be completely successful. It was at the last moment.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: And in the end states on all sides did make compromises, the nuclear weapons states did. They got their indefinite extension but they had to swallow these documents that were adopted. The major developing countries and the major Non-Aligned states [inaudible] and so on and they had to swallow hard. And I would like to think that reason prevailed because of the concept I mentioned half an hour ago.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: You don't compromise on the core principle that no one should have nuclear weapons. Now I guess the last part of your questions we should turn to, it's been a long time already, which is that, what's happened.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: What about implementing.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Well, I want to sort of transition into that period by asking was the

Australian government satisfied with the result of the conference?

RICHARD BUTLER: Yes, I think so. Yes.

MICHAL ONDERCO: And were you personally satisfied with the outcome of the conference?

RICHARD BUTLER: Yeah, I mean I can always think of something that might be better or you might prefer to have happened.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: But, I think it was pretty miraculous that we got there. See, I'm one of those who in my private belief, I think the problem of the sheer hypocrisy of the Treaty, of the nuclear apartheid that many have called it.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: The have's and the have-not's. The problem of the hypocrisy of the way in which the Treaty is operated, the unevenness, unfairness of it, is a deep systemic problem. If we come to have a nuclear failure, that is some situation slips out of control and nuclear weapons are used-which would be a catastrophe-if there is a catastrophe, in the end, future wise people, like you, would say you know we should have seen this coming, it was never going to be a stable system when some were allowed to get away with asserting that we have to be able to hold weapons that will kill the earth, that will kill every living thing on the earth, for our individual national security. But you may not. What is being said to Iran today: you may not.

MICHAL ONDERCO: So in...

RICHARD BUTLER: This is, deeply unstable and unsatisfactory situation. So, the fact that we were able to live to fight on another day hopefully will move towards more reductions in nuclear weapons, and maybe they are more dangerous than their worth. And you know, in a way Michal, I think that's the way nuclear disarmament will take place when it comes. The judgment will be reached that you know, they're unusable.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: Because there's nothing, there's nothing that you can achieve by using nuclear weapons, all you'll achieve is everyone's destruction including the global environment. And so it's pretty damn stupid. And besides we've not got other weapons that don't do that and give us pretty good security and that unfortunately is the case.

Nuclear weapons will disappear one day because it will be recognized that they're not usable. And in any case, there are other ways to maintain your security without killing every civilian, every bird, every plant, poisoning the earth through radioactive fallout and so on, you know the problem.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: But you know, we, but as far as proliferation is concerned, the NPT remains important even though there are now at least four other states who are

outside the Treaty and have proliferated. And I think, yeah, I mean at the end I was satisfied that we got a solution by consensus and indefinite extension, yes.

MICHAL ONDERCO: So at the beginning of the, when we started to talk, of the interview, you mentioned that there was at that time a hope that actually nuclear disarmament was within the reach, and that it was feasible. So I want to, as a last question, I want to ask you what were your concrete expectations about the future at that time? So when you said you felt that nuclear disarmament was possible, how did you think this might come about, in sort of a more concrete way?

RICHARD BUTLER: I'd have to think back, how did I think that it might come about. You mean at that time?

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes, at that time, yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: Well. It sounds silly now because today's world is very different from that world.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: I thought probably by a combination of factors. One, and I'll leave the politics till last because the politics is fundamental...

MICHAL ONDERCO: Right.

RICHARD BUTLER: ...everything is determined by politics. But one because there are steps that could be taken that would increase national confidence in security without nuclear weapons, and there's a whole range of steps of progressive, balanced arms reduction, verification mechanisms, and so on. That the things that Canberra commission outlined. The Canberra commission addressed very substantially the feasibility of "could this physically be done safely?"

And it came up with a whole series of steps that could be taken where the answer would be "yes, it can be done safely and effectively." That's if states are willing to do it. That's the political question.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: Secondly, at that time, I think I thought that there was sufficient anxiety that had been expressed in the context of indefinite extension by key states. If their concerns were not taken into account, that they would leave the Treaty, the Treaty would collapse and we might then go into a period of the proliferation of nuclear weapons in the world.

I think no matter what bluster and posturing the nuclear weapons states used, and they used a lot of it, all threats, I think there was a significant number of non-aligned states of great importance. And of course Egypt, Indonesia are examples of that, who were successfully making clear that this can't go on.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Right.

RICHARD BUTLER: There has to be progress in nuclear arms reduction or we will have to reconsider our position. And I think no matter how much weapon states wouldn't want to admit that publicly, behind closed doors and in their private consultations, I

think they reckoned that there was a case to answer here and they would have to do something about it.

Thirdly and finally the politics. There were some reasons to think then that the big power politics might actually stay on a more even keel than they had during the Cold War, the whole mark of which was the nuclear arms race and the threat of mutual assured destruction.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: They were the hallmarks of that. And if big power relations could move away from that and they recently sort of moved away from that, then they might be able to give a green light politically to the first to two things I mentioned, to actually doing some more treaties [inaudible]. Of course, the second point, they recognized that the consequences could be, next time, the breakdown of the Treaty.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: With significant countries leaving it and starting to make nuclear weapons. Indonesia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, you name it, you know their names.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: Today we're even hearing the name of Japan. You know.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah. Okay, well I...

RICHARD BUTLER: So, but today we're not in that situation. And it's interesting to think about why we're not. Should I tell you why we're not?

MICHAL ONDERCO: Well, tell me.

RICHARD BUTLER: Well, you probably know better than I do, that's not our subject is it?

MICHAL ONDERCO: Well, I reached the end of my questions. But before we end...

RICHARD BUTLER: Sorry, back on our subject, the implementation of the documents agreed to in 1995 is something I've lost track of. I'm not particularly in a position to comment upon.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: But I suspect, I suspect it's not been great. And other instruments like the Nuclear Suppliers Group have been modified to take account of that. I mean the very idea that India and now Pakistan wants it as well, is to be admitted to the Nuclear Suppliers Group. George W. Bush wanted to do that.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: Is something in 1995 I would have said "under no question, that's ludicrous, that's out of the question." But it's happening.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Before we end, I like to end these interviews with the question whether there is something that I should have asked about and I didn't so is there something big and major that I'm missing?

RICHARD BUTLER: No, Michal, I don't think so. No, I mean there's the modern period to talk about but we haven't got time for that now and it's all completely changed, it's completely changed and the next review conference is [inaudible].

MICHAL ONDERCO: Sorry. I think the connection...

RICHARD BUTLER: Hello.

MICHAL ONDERCO: I'm afraid the connection was cut off.

RICHARD BUTLER: No, it's coming back. The next review conference is in 2020 right?

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yes.

RICHARD BUTLER: Well, it will have to have a different agenda which takes into account what's happened in great power relations, the buildup of new nuclear weapons in contradictions to the obligations of the Treaty.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah.

RICHARD BUTLER: And of course the role of non-state groups, terrorist groups, and so on. It's a very different world now, so where that will lead I'm not sure.

MICHAL ONDERCO: Yeah. Well, thank you very much for finding the time to talk to me. I'm now switching off the recording.