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Oral History Interview with Peter Goosen

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Peter Goosen

South Africa

Oral history interview conducted by Michal Onderco by Skype on 28 June 2017

Michal Onderco:

This interview is a part of a bigger project on the 1995 NPT Review Conference. And as a part of it, we tried to interview the diplomats who took part in the conference from all the relevant countries, of course including South Africa. And so far we have interviewed almost everyone except for South African diplomats. So, I'm looking forward to talking to you about your memories and experiences from the conference.

Peter Goosen:

Sure.

Michal Onderco:

As I informed you before, the interview will be on the record and a transcription of it will be made publicly available. However, if there is any part that you wish to have off the record, then just tell me and I will turn off the recording and that part will not be made public. Do you have any questions about the process at the moment or about the project?

Peter Goosen:

No. I mean, you could just explain a little bit what the project is - what the purpose is behind the project, but I understand the process. I mean, you ask me questions, we'll talk about stuff, if it's something that I want to have on record I'll say so, and then you'll switch off the recording device.

Michal Onderco:

So let's start with the first question, and I want to start with a very general question. If you could help me to understand what was your role in the delegation, and essentially how did you become part of the delegation?

Peter Goosen:

I was appointed in that period of time in '95, '94 and so on, I mean South Africa was going through -

Michal Onderco:

Yes.

Peter Goosen:

- political changes as well, as you're aware. And as a consequence, our whole foreign ministry was being reorganized and redone. And - so - and one of the areas was in the multilateral environment, where South Africa prior to 1994 had not been very active in the multilateral environment primarily because of sanctions that were passed as a result of the apartheid system in South Africa. So there were many units inside the foreign ministry that were fairly newly created, to try and be able to allow South Africa on a diplomatic front now after democracy to engage in the multilateral environment. And one of those units that was created was at that time was a sub-directorate dealing with disarmament and nonproliferation. And I was appointed the head of that.

Michal Onderco:
Okay.

Peter Goosen:
And so that's how I were became involved in it. I attended the PrepComs, all of them except the first one.

Michal Onderco:
Yes.

Peter Goosen:
I didn't get to the first one. And the reason I didn't go to the first one was that we consciously decided not to attend the first one. We sent some local representatives from our embassy, our mission in New York. Because the full transition to democracy had not yet taken place, and so we were unsure what the reception would be like.

Michal Onderco:
[affirmative]

Michal Onderco:
And so this was pre-'94. And so we sent some local representatives and things went smoothly, and so after that I used to go to the meetings. And obviously in '94 when the transition took place and then, you know, we just participated.

Michal Onderco:
Yes. When -

Peter Goosen:
The second part was what was on the delegation. The delegation was led by the most senior official with us, was a man by the name of Tom Wheeler, who passed away recently. But I was the lead official on substance.

Michal Onderco:
[affirmative]

Peter Goosen:
On the delegation I wrote all the papers, I wrote all the speeches and that sort of stuff. And I was the participant in the negotiations that took place because I had developed the background knowledge to be able to do that. We had somebody hold a delegation as an advisor, Abdul Minty, he was a member as well. And, there was another chap, Jean duPreez . But he was working for me.

Michal Onderco:
Yes.

Peter Goosen:
You might have heard about or come across. And yeah. I think that was more or less the delegation. That was more or less the delegation, really. Myself as sort of the lead substance person. And then the others which were more senior or more junior.

Michal Onderco:
When I saw the documents from the South African delegation and one of them

mentioned that Minty was participating under separate cover, which I found very interesting.

Peter Goosen:

Abdul Minty wasn't - I mean later on he became employed at the Department of International Affairs - or what Foreign Service was named. But at that point in time he was still living in Norway if I remember correctly, in Oslo. And he was an advisor to the delegation.

Michal Onderco:

Okay.

Peter Goosen:

He was not a government employee.

Michal Onderco:

Okay.

Michal Onderco:

He wasn't part of the Foreign Service. There was no undercover, nothing. I mean, it was totally open that Minty was there. And I mean he sat in the South Africa delegation seats with the rest of us, and so on. But he was not an official of the South African at that point, no. Later on he did, but not at that point.

Michal Onderco:

When did you actually starting to seriously think at the 1995 conference in South African setting?

Peter Goosen:

Oh, we started thinking about it really early on. I mean, I can't remember the exact year. This was a long time ago now. But from the very first PrepCom.

Michal Onderco:

[affirmative]

Peter Goosen:

We think of this issue. Obviously South Africa was of interest on the international stage because around about that time before the conference took place, before '95, there was the announcement that South Africa had destroyed a nuclear weapons capability.

Michal Onderco:

Yes.

Peter Goosen:

And it was, I mean it was the first country that voluntarily and unilaterally destroyed such a capability. That was of course of interest in the NPT context, which made South Africa maybe a little bit more relevant in that context. So very early on, we are looking at this issue, but we were complete babes in the wood. And this was the first major conference that all of us that were working on these issue were participating in. I mean, to be honest, we didn't understand how the conferences worked. We didn't understand, you know, what was going to happen and that sort of stuff. All of this we had to learn on the job.

Michal Onderco:
Okay.

Peter Goosen:
And as we were preparing for things and so on, went to a lot of PPNN meetings.

Michal Onderco:
Yes.

Peter Goosen:
Whatever, I can't remember the acronym. And to just sort of learn this background, get the information and that sort of stuff to be able to understand. And then we wrote some draft position papers which South Africa could look at in terms of the position that South Africa could adopt on that. One of which was a legal that was done by our legal division. We have a legal division in the foreign ministry.

Michal Onderco:
Yeah.

Peter Goosen:
Which was a legal opinion on the end of the treaty, I think you might have seen this paper already. And which contained sort of -

Michal Onderco:
[affirmative]

Peter Goosen:
- a legal analysis of what are the options that you could look at. And there was one of the documents that we made available to our principals to be able to decide what our policy would be. So we were doing a lot of work, and we were trying to learn as quickly and as fast as what we could. But at the same time we were learning on the job.

Michal Onderco:
Yeah.

Peter Goosen:
As you were going along you were learning how this was working, yeah.

Michal Onderco:
But you already alluded to the legal position, but that legal position suggested that the preferred option should be to go for the rolling extension of the treaty.

Peter Goosen:
Yeah.

Michal Onderco:
And if I understand correctly, that was even the position that South Africa advocated as late as the fourth PrepCom.

Peter Goosen:

What the legal paper did is it set out the options. Now, and it didn't come to a conclusion about which option. So there was no position on an option. We - and I was one of the people that worked on it, so you know, I know the background here. But there were no - and I haven't seen that paper since '95 - there was no position that was favored as a result of the paper. The paper was written as a legal exercise.

Michal Onderco:
[affirmative]

Peter Goosen:
Firstly, for us to see what are the options, and secondly that we thought that the paper was really very good, so we thought well let's kind of hand it in as a paper at the conference. And give a basis to talk from and that sort of thing. Well, I mean, one period extension is fairly easy. It doesn't take a lot of words to describe what that option is.

Michal Onderco:
Yeah.

Peter Goosen:
So you do that in a fairly small space of time. The same with indefinite extension. I mean, indefinite extension is indefinite extension. A lot of people at that time were talking about sort of rolling periods of extension, but what they weren't talking about was what is the decision-making mechanism that we use to do that. And most people were talking about a sort of a red light extension methodology. In other words, there would be rolling extensions and they would just roll until there was a decision -

Michal Onderco:
Yes.

Peter Goosen:
- not to extend again. And then our legal people said no, but that's not the only decision-making mechanism that you could have. You could have another decision-making mechanism which would be a green light decision-making. Which would be that after every period, you would need to decide to go on to the next period.

Michal Onderco:
Yes.

Peter Goosen:
Now that took a lot of explaining and took up a lot of paperwork, and a lot of pages and so on. So while if you read the paper there's a lot of concentration on those elements, that wasn't intended to say this was our position.

Michal Onderco:
Okay.

Peter Goosen:
Because we would - you misunderstand something as well, because you must always see whatever happened in '95, you have to be in the context of the political transformation that was taking place in South Africa.

Michal Onderco:
Okay.

Peter Goosen:
So we had a new government. So, the officials were very careful not to kind of put words in our politicians' minds, or our principals' mouths, because we needed to find out what our principals thought on these issues. Because clearly they weren't the same as what previous people had thought.

Michal Onderco:
[affirmative]

Peter Goosen:
So, we were very cautious about not putting forward a final view.

Michal Onderco:
[affirmative]

Peter Goosen:
And our principals at the time, did not have the opportunity to exercise their minds. And that came later. It came after the fourth PrepCom.

Michal Onderco:
So in the fourth PrepCom when there was a discussion about - because I also managed to find a memorandum of a meeting, and I think we will get to that. But in that memorandum it said that there was a discussion at the fourth PrepCom, a dinner organized by a Canadian ambassador where the proposal for the rolling extension has been discussed.

Peter Goosen:
The dinner was in a hotel in Geneva near the bridge.

Michal Onderco:
Yeah.

Peter Goosen:
I know exactly which.

Michal Onderco:
Yeah. And so when you discussed at the time the sort of rolling extension, that was still not the official position?

Peter Goosen:
Well, you have to remember what happened.

Michal Onderco:
Yeah.

Peter Goosen:
I mean, I was at the dinner. And what the dinner was being - what was being done at this dinner was the, you know, obviously this was a Canadian dinner. They had their

people that thought along the same lines as Canada were there. And there was a few delegations that they were trying to influence.

Michal Onderco:
Yeah.

Peter Goosen:
And so, what the host of the dinner, the Canadian ambassador, did was he started going around the table and everybody was to say what their position was.

Michal Onderco:
[affirmative]

Peter Goosen:
And they were going around, it was indefinite extension, indefinite extension, indefinite extension, indefinite extension, indefinite extension, and it came to me.

Michal Onderco:
[laughs]

Peter Goosen:
I mean, this is the way people do these things, and what they do this - I mean, the way I saw it when I was sitting there was that it was to put you on the spot.

Michal Onderco:
Yeah.

Peter Goosen:
Now, you have to - now everybody's there, they're looking at you, everybody else has said indefinite and now it's you. And so I said, "I can't say indefinite extension." Because I couldn't.

Michal Onderco:
Yeah.

Peter Goosen:
The decision had not been made. I said, "That is not the only option. The other options are available according to the treaty, and these are the options." And now the Canadians who probably wrote this memorandum, how they interpreted that, that's their business. But for me, it was just that I couldn't allow myself to be cornered into adopting a position simply to have a nice dinner. That wasn't -

Michal Onderco:
When did your principals have the opportunity to make up their mind?

Peter Goosen:
I can't remember the exact dates. I was posted to Switzerland to become part of the disarmament delegation to Geneva in January I think of '95, if I remember correctly. And right about April I was summoned back to an office for a consultation, which included a meeting which I think is fairly well known about. It was a meeting with our principals.

Michal Onderco:
Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

Which was on a Saturday the meeting took place. And the meeting was with some very senior principals, and what was done at the meeting was a presentation was made of what was the various options that were available to extend the treaty. Fixed period, indefinite, a rolling extension -

Michal Onderco:
Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

- with a green light, rolling extension with a red light. And who were the people that were proposing these things, and who -

Michal Onderco:
Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

- were the proponents of them, and how large they were. That sort of stuff. So a total analysis was put up on the board, and to be able to provide the basis for discussion. The most senior of our principals that was present, which was at a very senior political level, turned around and said, "No, I think this position has to be that we support indefinite extension." And the rationale for that was - there was a range of rationales, including one that I personally found very interesting, was that human beings have the right, and it's almost as if it's a human right, to have their life not to be threatened by weapons of mass destruction.

Michal Onderco:
[affirmative]

Peter Goosen:

And as a consequence, South Africa could do, knowing that would sort of - South Africa would have to adopt the position which would support the elimination of these weapons and the nonproliferation of these weapons. That they do not proliferate, and in fact that they should be eliminated.

So that human beings are not any longer threatened by them. The argument that was made was a very interesting one, it was the first time I'd heard that sort of argument being put forward and so on. And in the end, a decision was made that perhaps South Africa will support the indefinite extension, but this cannot be a blame trick.

There has to be something else, there has to be a commitment, particularly by the weapon states. And not just the weapon states, but all of the treaty's parties that things were not going to be the same as what they'd been in the past. That things have to change. All right. And the task was then given to us, or to me, to go away and come up with something that would be the something else. And we had to provide that by the next day, Sunday. That was the instruction. All right? The meeting was on the Saturday morning, and the instruction was you go away now, you go and sit down and write this. You've got to come up with something that South Africa can ask for and that should be the quid pro quo. Myself and the colleague that I spoke about early on, Jean DuPreez, we were the two officials that were there that were the substance officials. We went to the office and we sat there sort of saying,

"Well, what are we going to ask for?"

And the one of the things that was said by - one of the words that was used by the most senior political principal that was there was he said, "Jean, we need to establish some principles. We need to use the word." And we had to go away and sort this out. And this is where the whole concept at that stage was known as Principles of Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament was drafted. In fact, the word "objectives" was only added at the conference, and it was added I think if I remember correctly as a result of a proposal by the Indonesians. So originally what South Africa proposed was Principles for Non-Proliferation. And we wrote the whole proposal, which you then read in the speech.

And in fact it was written that weekend. Verbatim. It was then incorporated in a letter which was sent to some -

Michal Onderco:
Al Gore?

Peter Goosen:
Well, not only. It was to other people as well.

Michal Onderco:
Okay.

Peter Goosen:
And that letter was sent off. One of the recipients was Al Gore. Because the letter was signed on our level by -

Michal Onderco
[affirmative]

Peter Goosen:
- the deputy President, that went to Al Gore. The same day a letter was also signed by our minister which went to foreign ministers and all sorts of -

Michal Onderco:
Yeah.

Peter Goosen:
- places. That was done so that we could [inaudible] our views on this thing.

And that, what was the contents of that letter later became the - when the minister Nzo spoke about the principles in his speech was verbatim what came out of that letter.

Michal Onderco:
Could I come back to something that we discussed just a second ago? And then I have a follow-up. Because I've had this student assistant to have a look at the DIRCO archives. And in February '95 there was a memo written for the minister that said that the extension option which has the possibility of drawing the most support is a successive fixed period which would extend the treaty in perpetuity, and that this is a South African proposal.

Peter Goosen:
Yeah.

Michal Onderco:

So the question is: you said that at the time that decision was made only in April. But this memo written in February, so two months before that, says essentially "our proposal is fixed rolling extension."

Peter Goosen:

You've got to understand how our government system works, I don't know how the Dutch system works, whatever, is we write these memos. Today we call them submissions, they actually look different but they are actually the same sort of thing. Then, it goes upstairs for approval. So coming towards the end of this period, in '95, I mean to pressure is starting to bolt.

On us as officials to - in meetings people are coming to see us, people are knocking on the door, what's the South African position? So what we did is we proposed a position. We got these legal people did this analysis, so we've got this position. So we thought now this to us appears as that this might be able to work.

Michal Onderco:
Okay.

Peter Goosen:

Let's send it upstairs for him to approve. So it doesn't become the South African position until the minister approves it as becoming the South African position.

Michal Onderco:

Okay. But you still -

Peter Goosen:

But we write papers on everything, I mean.

Michal Onderco:

But this was still the basis on which you operated at the fourth PrepCom?

Peter Goosen:

No. At the fourth PrepCom we presented the legal opinion, yeah.

Michal Onderco:

And when we talked about the principle and how they made change. I mean it's also sort of known that there was quite the bit of - I don't want to say pressure - but Al Gore has tried on many occasions to put influence on Thabo Mbeki and tried to pressure him to go with the indefinite extension. And part of it happened at the visit that Mbeki did to Washington in 1995. Do you know if that has any influence on Mbeki's actual thinking?

Peter Goosen:

I didn't know about it, so you know, I don't. I mean I think Thabo Mbeki, and I knew him much better after that, and I think he was a politician that was very comfortable in his own skin.

Michal Onderco:

[affirmative]

Peter Goosen:

You know, if I can use that terminology. I'm not talking black or white, I mean he was very comfortable with himself, can I use that wording.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

So he was very comfortable with himself. I think Thabo Mbeki would, you know, certainly talk to Al Gore. I mean, he'd listen to what the arguments were and would make up his own mind about what he thought should be the approach that's adopted by South Africa. I don't think - and especially even at that particular point in time in our history, I mean South Africa was being very... I mean - Nelson Mandela, with the Rainbow Nation, we weren't really that easy to say that we must think the way other people tell us to think.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

This was not easy for people to do with us. But what was being followed, not just in that area, but was being followed in many areas of foreign policy was a very principled foreign policy.

Michal Onderco:

[affirmative]

Peter Goosen:

That we're talking '94, '95, so that period of time there was a very principled foreign policy that was being adopted and being followed. Much of it led by, you know, by the vision of Mandela and so on. So what Mbeki had to say about extension of the NPT, I mean it made sense to me.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

That this was a principled position. With South Africa, in fact and that was the words that was used, we didn't have a choice. We had to support it - if you supported the view that weapons of mass destruction should be destroyed and shouldn't be available to people, you have no choice but to accept the indefinite extension of the NPT. And then you would then later on work on trying to eliminate the rest of the weapons. But the one thing that you could not do was to eliminate the instrument to prevent proliferation and then allow proliferation.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

So this was the logic of Mbeki. Now, by the end of it there, Mbeki - I mean, I can't go into his mind. But I know him as a person, and I've worked with him. I know the way

that he thinks, or at least I think I know the way that he thinks. And I don't think he would've been felt under pressure to make a certain decision. And I don't think South Africa, particularly at that point in time of its history, would have felt under pressure to do anything.

Michal Onderco:

Even earlier in 1993, Colin Powell sent a letter to President Mandela on behalf of the U.S. government trying to advocate for the support for indefinite extension. How was that letter received?

Peter Goosen:

I don't know. Before '93, I mean, the transition in South Africa took place in '94.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah. So it must have been in '94.

Peter Goosen:

The communications with President Mandela, he was president of the ANC at the time, not president of the country and so on. These were not - I was not aware of that communication, so.

Michal Onderco:

Oh, okay.

Peter Goosen:

And the thinking at least of the officials, that were being told what we needed to do, was something like this. There was no reference to this letter that you talked about, which I am not aware of. And there was also no reference to Al Gore conversations or anything like that. There was never any discussion about these issues.

Michal Onderco:

Okay. When I interviewed the Canadian representative to the conference, Sven Jurchewsky, he mentioned your discussion that you had in Chilworth already -

Peter Goosen:

About?

Michal Onderco:

In Chilworth in Southampton, in the U.K.

Peter Goosen:

Oh. Oh, the conversations when we were in Southampton and so on was before the decision had been made by the government.

Michal Onderco:

What Mr. Jurchewsky told me is at that time you already sort of started to think about what would be the good strategy to work towards some sort of indefinite extension. And you are just, if I understand correctly, you were just telling me that at that time there was no decision made in South Africa ...

Peter Goosen:

There was no decision made, I mean he might've - I think actually at the time I had in

my mind the belief that South Africa had been designated to the Canadians together with a few other countries, probably they had been divided out amongst the West. That they had to lobby so that they could concentrate their lobbying efforts. And I saw Mr. whatever [Jurchewsky], this sort of focus the Canadians were trying to put on me, as being that this was part of this lobbying effort that was being made, that I was being targeted particularly by the Canadians.

Michal Onderco:
Okay.

Peter Goosen:
And if that was correct or whether it was wrong, but that certainly was I felt like. It was like he was supposed to be my buddy sort of thing, you know.

Michal Onderco:
Yeah.

Peter Goosen:
And now I'm a fairly sociable kind of guy. I'll play snooker with you, I'll play billiards with you. I'll try and find out what you think about things, same as what you're trying to find out what I think about things. But the only people that are going to make a decision on what I think and what I'm going to do at the end of the day is certainly not somebody from a Canadian delegation in Southampton.

Michal Onderco:
Okay.

Peter Goosen:
That make their decisions set in Pretoria, and with my principals and my political principals.

Michal Onderco:
When the decision to pursue the indefinite extension was made in Pretoria in April 1995, I understand that it has been followed up, and the principles were produced, and so on and so forth. But has there been any sort of internal opposition within South Africa to that decision?

Peter Goosen:
There was discussion. I mean obviously the people had different points of view. We're all human beings.

And everybody that was participating in this discussion, this wasn't a very big circle of people. This was a fairly small number of people, that were participating in this discussion, [they] had views about it.

Michal Onderco:
Yeah.

Peter Goosen:
About what might be best, what might not be best, and they were differing opinions that were about it. And this is what how we reach policy decisions generally is we discuss it, the various options are put forth, there are proponents of those options that make the arguments for them, and in the end a decision gets made and then we

all pull into line and then we go off after the decision.

So yeah, differences of views and so on about whether they should be a fixed period extension, whether that was the right option, what were the pros, what were the cons, whether there was rolling extensions. You know, what the problems were with a red light, what were the problems with a green light, all of this was discussed. And people put forward the different arguments that related to those things. But at the end of the day, it's our job as officials to put forward those options in the best way that we can, and then after a policy decision needs to be made about what we're going to follow or not follow. And that's the way it works.

Michal Onderco:

And that policy decision in that meeting was made by Thabo Mbeki?

Peter Goosen:

Oh, I mean, Thabo Mbeki was present in the meeting, he was the most senior person in the room. But there were other people in the room as well, it wasn't just him on his own. And when he was - I mean it's not South Africa, especially - I mean, we are a democracy. So it's not that the hammer goes down and you will now obey the orders. The thing is "do we have agreement on this"? And the people said fine, this is what we're willing to, you know, we all agree and are going to do. But as I said, there were just some of those broad umbrella pad views that were put forward about it, and then it was an issue to take it away and to put flesh onto it. And that was done between from the Saturday morning, Saturday afternoon to the Sunday when the proposal was tabled to our principals. And then Monday it was delivered to President Mbeki.

Michal Onderco:

So when the meeting was over and you were sort of faced with a empty page, and that needed to be filled by the next morning, how did you start to come with the wording and with the content of what is supposed to be in that document?

Peter Goosen:

I think while I type.

Michal Onderco:

Okay.

Peter Goosen:

I'm a one-finger typer, so I don't type very fast.

Michal Onderco:

[laughs]

Peter Goosen:

Which allows me time to think. My friend and colleague Jean DuPreez was with me, and we said whatever, we do this and the deputy President said that we want to have these principles and we want something in exchange. What sort of stuff we can ask for? When you sat there and you just try to type it in a way, I mean, you moved it around, I mean I tell you between in a 24-hour period there's lots of hours to type.

Michal Onderco:

But when I - yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

By hours you can refine and come up with something that is of good quality, and that's what we did. We worked until late night and from very early on the Sunday to work and refine and come up with what it was, and when we laid it when we tabled on the Sunday afternoon, people were really happy and impressed. And then Monday it was taken to Mbeki, who signed off on it. In fact, what was taken to Mbeki was it in a letter format, which was then subsequently converted to letters to different people.

Michal Onderco:

So which parts did you spend most time thinking about?

Peter Goosen:

You see, you must remember what I told you in the beginning - I mean, I'd never been to a review conference in my life.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

Not one of us had ever been to a review conference. We didn't understand how it worked, we didn't understand - you know, we didn't know whether our ideas would be good ideas. We thought they were good ideas, we didn't know whether they'd be good ideas. There was nobody to test them with. This was done in a very short space of time.

Michal Onderco:

So essentially the whole document, before it was sent to your principals, has been essentially discussed only between you and Jean DuPreez?

Peter Goosen:

Well, yeah. It was our task as the two line officials. What we referred to as line-function officials. To come up with the - we were given the instruction, and it's your job then to go away and come up with the ideas.

I mean, it was what I said. We were created as a sub directorate. The entire sub directorate had a staff of five. So two of us working on it was quite a big number of people working on this for what we -

Michal Onderco:

Forty percent of the department.

Peter Goosen:

No, of that particular unit working on that issue.

So it was - I mean, it was cool. I mean, we had both of us we'd worked before in our careers together, so we understood how we thought and worked and that sort of thing. And we could bounce ideas and come up with an idea, and then Jean would say, "No, that's a bit crazy," and "Let's try this." So we had a way of being able to work together that could produce something like that.

Michal Onderco:

In the final version of the document, for example there is no push for complete disarmament. It only calls on negotiations in good faith, on effective measures directed to nuclear disarmament. Why is the word "complete" missing?

Peter Goosen:

I have some of them here. There was 15 versions, working

Michal Onderco:

[laughs] Okay.

Peter Goosen:

Before - well, let me put it this way. When I say 15 versions of the Principles and Objectives, the actual document of the Principles and Objectives, well that stays with the Principles, because Objectives came right at the end.

Michal Onderco:

[affirmative]

Peter Goosen:

There was 15 drafts written before the first one was laid before anybody else.

Michal Onderco:

Okay.

Peter Goosen:

Yeah. And I have them.

Michal Onderco:

Oh, you have them.

Peter Goosen:

I think I do, yeah. And you won't get them, yeah. [laughs]

Michal Onderco:

[laughs]. Why?

Peter Goosen:

Yeah. There were 15 drafts, because I had to number each one to know which one I was working with. Which was the latest one so you didn't pick the wrong one.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

And we then went around and we spoke to lots of different people. This is now at the conference.

Michal Onderco:

At the conference?

Peter Goosen:

This is at the conference. This is after the basic ideas have been put forward. What happened was.. let me tell you what happened. So this meeting's in April, we write this thing, you know.

Michal Onderco:
[affirmative]

Peter Goosen:

It sets out basically word for word what was written about this, that appears in Prime Minister Nzo's speech. I mean, the Foreign Minister Nzo's speech got lots of other things about safeguards, and all this sort of stuff, so there's lots of pieces to it. But if you look at the piece that deals with the extension issue, that's drawn word for word with a few changes to make it fit into a speech from that was written that Saturday and Sunday. So we wrote. Now firstly as I mentioned to you we were really a little bit nervous because none of us had experience on this issue.

Michal Onderco:
Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

So we didn't know we were going to send Minister Nzo into the room. And people were going to laugh and think, "But these people are crazy."

Michal Onderco:
Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

We didn't know what the reaction would be to the ideas that we had.

Michal Onderco:
Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

So what we did was we went out with a number of people. I can't remember the names of them. There was a chap from Switzerland that was very prominent, he was very well-known on the safeguards side, and we showed it to him. The Swiss chap, we showed it to him. We let people read that speech and tell us - and not tell us, but while we'd give it to them to read we were all watching them very carefully to see if they'd burst out laughing.

Michal Onderco:
[laughs] Okay.

Peter Goosen:

And to see what's the reaction to this thing. And the reaction was very positive.

Michal Onderco:
Okay.

Peter Goosen:

And so what we did then was we took it back. You know, we said, "Yeah, this is cool, we've got to run with this one now." And the draft was given to the minister, and we said, "Minister, this speech is going to work. It's going to fly."

Michal Onderco:
Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

And the minister was very happy with the speech and he read the speech as it was written.

Michal Onderco:

Okay.

Peter Goosen:

So that was it. After that, now I remember suddenly we were being invited to all sorts of lunches, and the minister was being invited out and all this other stuff. And people wanted to know from us "Oh, now you've made this speech and made this proposal, everybody's very impressed. What are you going to do about it?" And we sort of sat there and thought we've got to do something about this [laughs]. Come on!

Michal Onderco:

[laughs]

Peter Goosen:

We've just wrote this speech. And if you look at the speech that was made, if you've got the documents, if you look at the speech that was made in the general debate -

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

The speech that was made in the first main committee -

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

One is an extract from the other.

Michal Onderco:

[affirmative]

Peter Goosen:

And the reason for that was that we didn't realize that, you know, that we were going to be asked "Now you've come up with this idea, now come and tell us your idea". We didn't understand that it worked like that.

So one of us, we were invited by Ambassador Dhanapala to a meeting. And Dhanapala said to us, he's going to convene this group and he'd like us to come forward with these principles. And when he walked out, my chief Tom Wheeler turned around to me and said to me, "You're up. Go ahead and do the Principles" [laughs]. And we worked after that weekend. And while the general debate was still going on. And wrote it 15 times. And I remember for example, I'll never forget we spoke with a Dutch colleague. I can't remember his name.

Michal Onderco:

Was it Ramaker?

Peter Goosen:

No, he was below Ramaker. He was the number two to Ramaker at the conference.

Michal Onderco:

Okay.

Peter Goosen:

And when I spoke to this Dutch colleague and he said to me, because what we'd written was actually paragraphs, and I remember he said it was one of the most valuable suggestions which we got. Because every time that we'd drafted, we went out and spoke to people about it.

And he turned around and he said to us, "But you define this document as principles, but your paragraphs are very long. Principles are short." He says, "You need to break these things up." And we go, "Oh, that makes sense." And so we went away and we took paragraphs, we had an entire paragraph on nuclear disarmament, and one paragraph that covered everything that was under: the current CTBT, disarmament, all the material in one paragraph. We went and broke it up into separate sentences, we basically took it and broke it up into sentences. Because that we thought was a valuable comment and made sense to us. And that times 15. Then we wrote number 15, and 15 was the one that was tabled in the group that Dhanapala called together.

Michal Onderco:

Immediately prior to the conference, were you in consultations about sort of how to go about indefinite extension with other countries?

Peter Goosen:

We were consulting with people like I told you, but that was after. Of course we had other people read it. We weren't coming to ask permission, we were just asking for people, "Could you have a look at this, what do you think of this," blah blah blah

And we would listen to what they had to say, and then we'd go away and we'd think about, "Oh, that made sense," and then we would do it. I remember this Swiss guy, there was one paragraph he said to us, "Now, this paragraph was" - I'll never forget, his remark was "this paragraph is 1990."

Michal Onderco:

[laughs]

Peter Goosen:

You guys need to adjust it in this way. And he explained. So we said to him, "What do you mean by 1990?" And he explained to us what had happened in 1990, because we weren't there.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

And so "oh, that makes sense", and so off we went. And we would make the adjustment and we'd sort of rewrite it until we thought well this is - we've covered this point, which is to increase the support. And that's the way we worked to create something. Again, to put something on the table, that other delegations would see this young country that has just emerged from the international stage, that we're

serious. I mean, we're not coming here with something that's just rubbish. That was what we were trying to do.

Michal Onderco:

Was there any sort of coordination with the P5?

Peter Goosen:

Well, we had meetings. There was a meeting between Minister Nzo and Al Gore.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

At whatever hotel it was, I can't remember where the delegation stayed. And Al Gore was very complimentary, but Al Gore didn't ask us for anything.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

What Al Gore said is that - and I was in the meeting and he said, look, he just wants to make it clear that the U.S. delegation is available to support South Africa on whatever we propose. That was what was said.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

And I'll tell you that the U.S. delegation did that. In the meetings that took place later on, they were always like a supportive voice. They didn't agree with us, but were always - well I mean, let me correct that. They didn't always agree with us, but they were always supportive in terms of what we were generally trying to do, which was what the instruction was from Al Gore.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

So I mean, so I saw it more as that they were told they had to work with us, not us to work with them.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

And we never worked with them. I mean, there were times that we each ran some of our ideas past, said, "Well, what do you guys think about this?" And they usually would tell us what they thought, and that was it. Finished. We went away. Some of the ideas we took on board, some of them we didn't take on board.

Michal Onderco:

So when the Canadians started to collect signatures for the resolution for indefinite

extension...

Peter Goosen:

This was not our business.

Michal Onderco:

So you were not involved with them?

Peter Goosen:

Well, when we went to this conference we didn't realize what we were going to have to do. It was a lot of work, and we were working until two, three o'clock, four o'clock in the mornings.

To try and produce the stuff. It wasn't - and like I keep on saying is we were new to this. So we were learning, we had to make sure that when we walked into the meetings we were 100 - no, 200 per cent prepared. Because we had to be prepared for something we didn't know not ever. Because we didn't have the experience for it. So we were over prepared for actually every meeting that we walked into.

Walking around collecting signatures, it was not... I don't know who farmed that out to the Canadians, or why they did that, or why they were tasked to do that. But that wasn't what we were about. We were about the proposal that had been made by my minister, by my government.

And making sure that that was realized. The rest was - the others could do this and, you know, collect whatever. I mean, I don't want to disparage what was done in that. But we didn't see that as our role. We didn't see that as what we were there for. We were there to achieve the goal which had been set for us at a meeting in Pretoria in April.

Michal Onderco:

But there are some who say that, for example, it's basically about a division of labor, right. So the Principles and Objectives, and the Strengthened Review Process documents, were essentially support for the indefinite extension. That the resolution would never be signed by many countries if Principles and Objectives were not there, if the Strengthened Review Process was not there.

Peter Goosen:

Let me - I'll answer your question this way.

Michal Onderco:

Okay.

Peter Goosen:

One of the things that's always been noticeable - and I've been involved in a few successes in international and multilateral diplomacy. I was involved in negotiation of the 13 steps for nuclear disarmament, I was involved in the negotiations for an anti-personnel land mine ban treaty. And when I say involved, sort of quite near the center of what was happening.

And one of the things that I've come to realize in my years of doing this work, and the most recent was as chair of the OPCW, Executive Council as well as the Conference of States Party, one of the things I've come to realize on this is that achievement has scrambled to be apparent.

You see all these people coming out of the woodwork, and they will say "we were a part of this" or "we were that" or "we were that." This doesn't faze me, because those that were there and were a part of the discussion on the inner circle - where things were actually done and decided upon and that sort of stuff - we know who was there. We know who wasn't. Whether there was this grand master plan that, you know, somebody would do this and somebody would collect signatures, and somebody would do this, somebody would do that. Well, they never shared that master plan with us.

Michal Onderco:

I'll come back to the negotiations and then I'll follow through. But during the conference there was at the same time running a conference of NAM in Bandung.

And South Africa together with Benin were the two countries that sort of are widely considered to have broken the NAM consensus against indefinite extension.

Peter Goosen:

Yeah.

Michal Onderco:

Well, I have two questions. The first one is, how did that happen? And second, what consequences did it have for South African position within NAM for non-proliferation and disarmament issues?

Peter Goosen:

Well I mean, what happened in Bandung, I wasn't there so I can't tell you exactly what happened in Bandung. I mean, I know there was dissatisfaction amongst - not all - NAM members. Because you must remember, at the end of the day all the NAM members supported the indefinite extension. So I don't know, there wasn't any sort of, how can I put it, a consensus view.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

If you had to add up the numbers, I wouldn't even be sure what the actual numbers were, one side versus the other in terms of indefinite versus other opinions and things like this. But certainly some of the key players inside the NAM had different views on the issue. And when, you know, wanted people to have the same view amongst the Non-Aligned Movement.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

South Africa was clearly a player. We were playing broad at the conference, so clearly we were a player. And I imagine people were disappointed that we didn't necessarily share the views that they held on these things. But again, it comes to the point that I made earlier on is, I mean this decision was taken at a very senior level in South Africa.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

So our officials, whether they attended the conference in Bandung, or attending any other meeting, or the NPT conference in New York, had no space to suddenly move off in a different direction. So policy decision had been made.

Michal Onderco:

When you were at the conference in New York, did you see a lot of difference between the public positions that different participants and countries took, and the positions they took in private or in closed meetings?

Peter Goosen:

I mean, people had to adapt because the reality had changed. I mean, the South African proposal that came to the conference on Principles and Objectives; I mean the Strengthened Review Process was something that never really interested me that much; this was something that came up to the conference for people hadn't expected it to come.

There were some that were aware of it on the basis of the letters that had been written and so on, but this was - for most of the countries that were inside the room, this was new. Dhanapala was not aware of what was being said.

The first time that this was exposed to the broad mass of the people other than those to whom letters had been written before the time, was the first time that they heard these ideas, and there was a very positive response to this.

Now, obviously as a delegation member, and I speak now just in general multilateral diplomacy, you as a delegate need to adjust to what's happening in the environment in which you're busy working.

So you would find that colleagues that might've had strong views about something all of a sudden, this is what's being discussed, and this is the direction that this conference is going to, now you have to adapt yourself to participate in those discussions or otherwise you become irrelevant to the conference. So some colleagues had to adapt and participate in the process while at the same time trying to influence the process in a direction that their countries favored. And people did that, yeah. But that's purely normal. I don't see that as people speaking one way in one place and then another thing.

This was people adapting to a situation that continuing to try and influence so that their governments' policies could receive the maximum realization in the discussions that were taking place.

Michal Onderco:

But the two very prominent examples of countries where there has been in the conference sort of very stark change in the position were Mexico and Venezuela. And in the case of Mexico the ambassador was essentially silenced, and in the case of Venezuela was actually withdrawn from the delegation.

Peter Goosen:

I've never noticed the Mexican ambassador being silenced [laughs].

Michal Onderco:

Sorry?

Peter Goosen:

I never noticed the Mexican ambassador being silenced.

Michal Onderco:

Oh, okay.

Peter Goosen:

He was an active participant in the negotiations. I mean, I think some people expected Mexico to block or something like that.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

But then that didn't happen. But in the meetings that I was in, and that was the same meetings he was in, the same place, the small group, the Mexican ambassador participated actively in those discussions. There was no - the Venezuelan I don't remember. I must be honest here, I don't remember Venezuela's view, or participation in the conference at all.

Michal Onderco:

Okay.

Peter Goosen:

I just don't. But I knew the Mexican ambassador quite well. Well I say quite well, I'd known him for a few months, but we'd got to know one another. So when he spoke I paid attention, so I can definitely say that he spoke a lot.

Michal Onderco:

Was South Africa willing to go for a vote to extend the treaty?

Peter Goosen:

This wasn't our job.

Michal Onderco:

Okay.

Peter Goosen:

This was kind of Dhanapala's job. What I had said to you just now was the same as sort of signature collection by the Canadians. We came here with a focus, and our focus was on the substance.

That was concluded. Whether the conclusion was that there had to be a vote at the conference. Clearly, I mean our view was that the best decision would be a decision taken by consensus. And possibly one of the worst scenarios would be a vote.

And we were quite open about saying that. But the one that would we need to reach that conclusion was Dhanapala. I chaired the OPCW Executive Council when there were decisions taken on the fact that destruction of chemical weapons had not taken place in accordance with the convention and its timelines.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

And there came a point in that meeting when I needed as the chair, because nobody else was going to do it for me, I walked around and actually asked some people to please say make the proposal there should be a vote. And they all said to me, "No, sorry, it's your job." And I went to the chair and I sat there, and I sat up there and I said, "I must tell you that I've reached this conclusion. That it's not possible to find a consensus," and that we would need to vote. And a vote was taken shortly after. And it was exactly the same situation I think that was there for Dhanapala, is he had worked for consensus, worked for consensus, worked for consensus. But if after some time it became clear that there was no consensus, and that there would be no consensus. Then I'm sure he was probably would have called for a vote. But in the end, he didn't need it. So that is all, you know, "what if" type of discussion.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah. When the Principles and Objectives, and the Strengthened Review Process got to the small discussion in the group convened by Dhanapala, the Friends of President, what were the fiercest - well, who were the fiercest opponents or the challengers, and what were the strongest points of criticism of the document? Documents?

Peter Goosen:

I mean, I think it's incorrect to say that there were strongest opponents. It's like I said to you early on, these delegations came to their own, that had different views or thought that this was maybe not the correct way to go. But you were brought into the room because this is what, Dhanapala said, was going to be the negotiation to take place.

Michal Onderco:

[affirmative]

Peter Goosen:

And when the negotiation was finished, we would see what the product is, and we would then make our decision on whether to extend the treaty in one way or another based on what the outcome was.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

So delegations came to the room to try and negotiate and influence the content of that document. So there was no negativism. I mean, you don't walk into a room and say, "I'm not going to negotiate this document," and then you'd lose the ability to influence.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

I mean, these are professional diplomats which were some of them were extremely highly skilled, in fact much more skilled than I was at the time. So, they came to that room and they tried their best to negotiate the language that was either the strongest or possibly the weakest, depending on what your perspective was. In those negotiations to the point where they could obtain eventually become an agreement on that particular item.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah. So who were the fiercest negotiators?

Peter Goosen:

Oh. Well, I don't think there was anybody in the room that was not a fierce negotiator. You must remember, it was a very small group that was brought in there, and who was brought in were people that were active.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

These were people that Dhanapala realized would play a role at that conference, and that he needed to have them on the inside and not on the out. Because if you had them on the outside you were going to not be able to reach an agreement. So the ones that you had in that room were - every single one of the people sitting in that room were active participants in those negotiations, and nobody sat there silently. Everybody was trying to influence it because that was the nature of the people you had around the table. Not one of those people had the personality just to sit there quietly. There were people like the Mexican ambassador that was trying to strengthen the language, you know.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

There were people like Sir Michael Weston that was trying to weaken some of the language on nuclear disarmament. That was trying to strengthen some of the language of non-proliferation. People were coming, I mean depending on the positions on the various [issues]. Because there's a lot of issues that are covered, depending on the nature of each particular issue were coming at it from their angle and trying to either strengthen, weaken, or improve. A lot of times, especially when you were getting beyond the contentious issues, there are people that were sitting there that were genuinely trying to improve the language. I mean, and there was a proper discussion about "Yeah, this language is good, but you know we could improve it by doing this and this," and there was an exchange about how you could improve the language. When it came to the issues that were sort of the non-controversial issues, that weren't the cause, that weren't the main focus of disagreement.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

Because it was with more than just that that there was some - so there was a different dynamic that played, depending on what the issues were I think if anybody says to you that some people were this or some people were that, that was not my experience. And I was, for my sins, was center in all of these things. And so I saw it all, I spoke with all these people, I met with them both in those rooms, I met with them privately.

Michal Onderco:

South Africa was not the only country for whom the conference was the first one. It was also China and France for whom this was the first conference.

Peter Goosen:

Yeah, but they were - it's a bit different from a country that had not participated. We had diplomats that were at the meeting representing that had never participated in multilateral negotiations ever before.

And who also had no experience in the multilateral environment before. Whereas the Chinese and the French had participated really actively for a very long period of time in multilateralism and understood the multinational environment. We arrived there without understanding the environment.

Michal Onderco:

Okay. The negotiation there was in the room about the Principles and Objectives, you already told me it wasn't connected, you didn't have the collection of the signatures for the resolution in your mind. And the first thing that people very often connect to the Principles and Objectives is also the decision on the Middle East. Was Middle East something that you had in mind?

Peter Goosen:

Let me just go back. Firstly, this collection of the signatures as far as I'm aware, I mean if I can recollect, and it was like I said it was not something that I focused on.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

That wasn't really.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

It was something that came very late in the conference. It wasn't something that was there in the beginning of the conference. I mean, it might have been in certain people's minds, maybe the Canadians or whatever.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

In their minds. But that was not something that was being talked about, or discussed, or happening.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah. Okay.

Peter Goosen:

It was only right towards the end of the conference when it looked as if when there was strong concern that there might in fact not be a consensus decision, that there was going to be a voted consent decision that was when this resolution and collection of signatures took place.

But that was very much after the negotiations in the small room had completed.

Michal Onderco:

So the small-room negotiations were done by the time Canadians started to collect signatures?

Peter Goosen:

Yeah. The collection of signatures came when it was done - after that. Because look, what was done was that you had the small room negotiations, and then Dhanapala took it to a bigger room.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

Because he needed to engage with more delegations.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

When it became apparent in that room that things were [good], after that was when this resolution made its appearance and people were walking it out trying to collect signatures. And if - I mean I can't remember it now, but you can maybe tell me, I'm not sure if South Africa signed this thing. I can't remember.

Michal Onderco:

Yes, you did.

Peter Goosen:

That shows you how much attention I was paying to it.

Michal Onderco:

[laughs]. But so you skipped the question about the Middle East.

Peter Goosen:

The Middle East was just as well. I mean, it was an issue that was out there, but it was an issue that we were not involved in. We recognized the issues revolving around the Middle East.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

But this was an issue that was being negotiated between the colleagues that were coming there from the Middle East.

Michal Onderco:

[affirmative]

Peter Goosen:

Involvement of the Americans and others. So that negotiation was taking place separately.

Michal Onderco:
Yeah.

Peter Goosen:
We did not participate in those negotiations. And I think many delegations, outside those that were directly interested, didn't participate.

Michal Onderco:
Yeah.

Peter Goosen:
And that was very much the same later on in 2000 when the whole issue was about Iraq as well. When that was sort of holding up the conclusion of the meeting. And that was also done separately. I mean, that's the way when issues like that come up in a conference. The basic thing is to take it to the interested delegations to solve it, and they come with what they can agree on, because you will find generally the rest can agree with what they can agree.

Michal Onderco:
So if there is someone who says that NPT would never be extended without an agreement on the Middle East; extended indefinitely without an agreement on the Middle East, you would contest that interpretation?

Peter Goosen:
No. I mean I think - I mean, that was their position. I think that was the position. I'm saying that I wasn't, we weren't involved in that.

Michal Onderco:
Yeah.

Peter Goosen:
That we weren't involved in those negotiations, and we didn't participate in those discussions. There were statements that were being made like that, yes.

But South Africa's - we're not in the Middle East. And what our approach was is that we would like there to be a solution to the conference, and that the delegations needed to work to find the solution, but that we would agree with what they could agree upon. South Africa wasn't going to come there with its own views on these issues, what the countries that were the most interested in this could agree on, that we would be happy to support.

Michal Onderco:
But if those negotiations broke down and didn't reach a conclusion, would that have changed your calculation?

Peter Goosen:
Well, it didn't happen, so we never had to reach that calculation.

Michal Onderco:
Okay. When immediately after the conference when the treaty was extended indefinitely, what were your expectation about what is going to happen next?

Peter Goosen:

Well, firstly that I could have some rest.

Michal Onderco:
[laughs]

Peter Goosen:

Because it's been a busy period while I was at the conference, and before the conference, it had been a very long time of very intensive work. And I was one of those that had argued in the small room, that we shouldn't have a PrepCom in the year after the conference.

Because there needed to be a time to reflect before we came to the first preparatory committee meeting, which would be a change for the Preparatory Meeting. Which was largely, I mean, we referenced the Strengthened Process in our statement, but those were ideas that, you know, the Canadians were sort of pushing along primarily.

We supported the concept of a Strengthened Process, but I think Dhanapala was the one that came after the first paper on nuclear [unintelligible]. My memory was a bit vague on that one.

Michal Onderco:

But it wasn't you who came up with the paper on the Strengthened Review Process?

Peter Goosen:

Not that I can recollect. I think we had input in it, but I think it was - yeah, I mean some ideas to put on a piece of paper. We did the first sort of ideas. But if you look at our statement you'll see we were very vague on this thing.

It was like we should come back and look at the Strengthened Review Process. That was more or less what we said.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

When we'd heard the others talking about, there needed to be a Strengthened Review Process and there needed to be this, but there was actually no clear idea about what it should be. And so we weren't sure, we thought we knew we would like the idea.

Michal Onderco:

[affirmative]

Peter Goosen:

But we actually weren't thinking about it ourselves. So we put the sort of the concepts that we had thought of, because it was in the statement, we put that on the table. And - but it wasn't like for example the Principles where we sat and we actually drafted the draft, and quite a lot of the language that is in the Principles and Objectives is the language that we drafted.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

That wasn't the case with the Strengthened Review Process. We are more associated with the Principles and Objectives. And I mean, the word "objectives" was put in very much right at the end, and that was a proposal from the Indonesian ambassador.

Michal Onderco:

And how did he justify putting in the word "objectives"?

Peter Goosen:

I think there'd been a statement that had been made in Jakarta at a very senior level or at a very senior level and so on that had spoken about the need for objectives and so on, and he pushed this argument. And everybody sitting around the room thought, "Well hey, this makes sense. Let's refer to it as the Principles and Objectives."

Michal Onderco:

Yeah. Okay.

Peter Goosen:

And it didn't undermine what had been done. It sort of maybe said it better. So that was cool. Never fight a good idea [laughs].

Michal Onderco:

Were there at the time expectations that, for example nuclear disarmament, would lead to complete disarmament within the foreseeable future?

Peter Goosen:

We thought [laughs]. No, our view was, and this was the whole point of what President Mbeki had come up with, was that this conference was going to come up with a serious - this was going to be a serious discussion that was going to take place. And that this was going to be a foundation for a greater commitment to implement the treaty, which included the nuclear disarmament provisions. You can tell me how much of that's been realized. And that was '95.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

In 2000, South Africa was one of the main players in the 13 Steps for Nuclear Disarmament.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

Together with the other New Agenda Coalition countries. But we were in there, participated in the drafting, wrote some of the stuff, participate in the negotiations for that. And that for us was a train of our views. It was written - when we got to 2000, Deputy President Mbeki was President Mbeki

Michal Onderco:

Yes.

Peter Goosen:

So, this was how our thinking was going.

Michal Onderco:

How much attention did he pay to the issues of nuclear proliferation and disarmament?

Peter Goosen:

What do you mean?

Michal Onderco:

Because there are some senior policymakers in some countries where the Prime Minister would basically not much reflect on these issues. Would Mbeki be someone who reflected a lot on these issues?

Peter Goosen:

I think President Mbeki reflected on a lot of issues when he was President of the country.

He was a very successful President of the country and so on. I mean, he had a lot of things that he was dealing with. He had some issues that were very close to his heart. The African agenda, the African Renaissance, these were things that were very close to his thinking and so on.

And where I think most of his thinking was spent on international relations, obviously there was domestic stuff as well. On the disarmament, non-proliferation, arms control side there were times later that he became directly personally involved in the issues.

Which are, I mean some of those incidents are fairly well known as well. For example, at the time, just before the invasion of Iraq, he was engaged on the issue as one of those who was also trying to work to resolve the situation without the necessity for war. And yeah, then I think that it was more than his engagement on the issue was driven more by what was happening on the international stage, and the international agenda, and so on. But I mean, the core group of officials by the time we got into these phases of it, we'd gotten much beyond five.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

Maybe in it we had a lot more expertise, we understood the international conferences, we understood the issues, we could negotiate with the best. We would walk into conferences and know exactly how that conference was going to work, and what should happen at that conference, and everything like that. We were way beyond the stage we were in in early '95.

Michal Onderco:

The Principles and Objectives call for universality of the treaty. At the time when you sort of first time put these words on the paper, did you see this as a sort of a lofty goal, or as a achievable goal?

Peter Goosen:

I don't think we saw it either as lofty or achievable. It's simply that it should be a goal.

Michal Onderco:
Okay.

Peter Goosen:

Now, the whole concept, if you go back now again to what our principals said, what our policymakers were saying, our decision-makers were saying, was that this was something which was an inherent right of people to expect of their governments. And we should be working on a very principled basis in support of that.

Now, you can sit there and we could have an interesting discussion about how realistic universality is.

Michal Onderco:
Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

But it certainly didn't mean to our policymakers, and our decision-makers, and our political principals, this does not mean that you didn't pursue the objective.

Michal Onderco:
[affirmative]. Okay.

Peter Goosen:

If you give up on the objective you'll never reach it. And if you find, if you look at the ANC's history, if the ANC had given up on the fight against apartheid, which had taken what, 50 odd years, or 40 odd years, this, you know. So you don't give up on those principles, you keep on struggling to achieve them.

Michal Onderco:

When the final version of the Principles and Objectives was adopted, and the treaty was extended indefinitely, was the final version of the document something that you were pleased with personally, as a person who wrote the first version?

Peter Goosen:

Let me put it this way, is I think it was the best that could be achieved in the environment.

We could've gone to this conference, which would've been more or less what would've happened if we hadn't come with our ideas - because nobody else came with ideas, we were the only ones that came with the idea - it would've been a straight-up fight about the method of extension. That would probably have been what that conference would've been about. And what we came with was a new thinking, a different way of looking at the problem. And saying to, "Look, let's make a trade-off. We have agreed to this, you have to agree to this."

That's why I said to you is I think it was for that conference in 1995 it was probably the best that could be achieved. Because if it had been a straight up-and-down fight about we are going to support this form of extension, we're going to support this form of extension, firstly it would've been a very messy thing. And secondly, no quid pro quo, no matter how strong or how weak or how good or how bad or how whatever, whatever, would've been achieved.

Michal Onderco:
Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

So when that was done, it was a sense of satisfaction that you've done something which hopefully would provide the basis into the future for something better in the world. Because was the benefit for the future regime, we do these things in the belief that hopefully things will go in the right direction. In the same way, as when we negotiated the 13 steps for nuclear disarmament.

It was done with a genuine hope and belief that people would actually come to take and do what they committed themselves to do.

Michal Onderco:

Some of the interviewees told me that they saw already the first beginnings of the nuclear ban movement in the 1995 Conference. The nuclear ban movement and the sort of what ended up in now the ongoing negotiations that are going on in New York. And they say it's completely predictable, that's what for example Ambassador Berdennikov of Russia told me.

Peter Goosen:

No. Ambassador Berdennikov is somebody I admire greatly, so I'll take his view.

Michal Onderco:

Okay.

Peter Goosen:

I must tell you, I didn't have a nuclear ban in my head when I was there.

He's a very accomplished diplomat. He's somebody that I - I was very new, very young, and there were certain figures that you learned from. And Ambassador Berdennikov was certainly one of them that I learned how to do this business. From being somebody who was completely new with no experience, there were certain figures, because I was working at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, that were like role models in the sense that you saw "oh right, so this is how you're supposed to do this thing. This is how your head should work, this is how it should think". And Bedanikov was one of those people, for me.

Ambassador [inaudible] of Mexico was another which I learned very, very much. And Arundhati Ghose of India was another one that I learned very much from. And there was a Pakistani ambassador. So yeah, I have great admiration for Ambassador Berdennikov, but I mean, that might be his view, but I can't say it was mine.

Michal Onderco:

Do you think that the ideas that you put forward in the Principles and Objectives would have been received the same way if South Africa was not a new democratized country, and if it didn't just unilaterally disarm?

Peter Goosen:

Yeah, I think they would've.

Michal Onderco:

You think so?

Peter Goosen:

Yes. I think the thing was, I think anybody who'd come with those ideas to the table - because there was a lacuna, a vacuum of thinking, or ideas on this. It was very much

the sort of traditional way of looking at this.

Michal Onderco:
[affirmative]

Peter Goosen:

We have a gathering, we're going to support indefinite extension or we're going to support no extension or we're going to support this. It was very, sort of a very narrow approach to the issues. And what we as a delegation came with, and I think if another delegation had done the same, was with a new way of thinking and saying, "Look, this is the problem and but we're not going to sort it out by going the traditional route. We're going to have to think differently."

And then putting forward the idea of how to deal with differently. I think it would've been recognized at the conference the same way ours was recognized. I mean, nobody except for a few people that we'd spoken to knew what Alfred Nzo was going to say that day.

But the response after we'd spoken was quite overwhelming, was much bigger than what we expected.

Michal Onderco:

But we - at the end of the day you represented this Rainbow Nation, as you called it here yourself. So there was sort of a brand that was behind him.

Peter Goosen:

Yeah, of course. But I think what people liked about it was the idea of fresh thinking.

And of course back then, coming from this country that was led by this one great man and, you know, that was this great success story that it was overcome its things and, you know, had destroyed a nuclear weapons capability. This added to what the idea. But at the end of the day I think that the idea itself stood on its own, as well. I'm much more cynical about the multilateral disarmament negotiating process to believe that people sit there and they think, "Oh, you guys are good guys and therefore we're going to agree to your idea." It doesn't work like that. Your ideas have got to be good enough in their own right as well.

Michal Onderco:

The fact that South Africa recently before that unilaterally disarmed, did that change in any way how you were thinking about the NPT?

Peter Goosen:

No, we were a party, that was about it. I mean, trying to figure out how to participate in this thing. It was fast, was very much of a learning process. We had firm views about nuclear weapons. And we still do. South Africa still has very clear views on nuclear weapons. We believe that disarmament should take place. We believe, you know, that these negotiations that the process should start and it should continue until all the weapons have been destroyed.

But those are things that come from both what we have done ourselves, destroying the nuclear weapons capability, and also comes from, again, the sort of principled positions that were being adopted. And then also this view that because something is tough, you don't mean you give up on it. If that had been the case, we would never as a country got the way we've got.

Michal Onderco:

But by now South Africa is no longer sort of seen as such a prominent bridge-builder, for example, in the whole process.

Peter Goosen:

Now?

Michal Onderco:

Yes.

Peter Goosen:

I don't know. The question I think that needs to be asked about what you're asking now is "what should the bridge be built from, and to what"? We negotiated the Principles and Objectives. The Principles and Objectives calls for the conclusion of the CTBT and for everybody to sign up to it.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

You can tell me if the CTBT has ended in the force, and whether the states have signed up to it. It calls for negotiation of a Fissile Material [Cut-Off] Treaty. You could tell me whether it's being negotiated or not, you know. It called for security assurances to be provided. You can tell me whether they have or whether they haven't, you know I mean. You get to the 13 steps, you can tell me what of those 13 steps have been done.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Peter Goosen:

Now, you say we're not the bridge-builders. But I mean, the undertakings have been made, you know. Do we build a bridge backwards that undermines those undertakings? Or do we continue to pursue those commitments that have been made, which are or are not being met?

So the whole idea of, well we used to be a bridge-builder, it wasn't that we used to be a bridge-builder. At that point in time that was what was necessary. Today it's necessary to pursue the things that flowed from those bridges that we built. And it's for those, that we built those bridges with, to cross the bridge.

Michal Onderco:

Okay.

Peter Goosen:

We've crossed it.

Michal Onderco:

Is there something about the conference that I should have asked about and I didn't? Is there something big that I'm missing?

Peter Goosen:

[laughs]. I wouldn't tell you if you did [laughs].

Michal Onderco:

[laughs]. Well but, you know, if there's something that you think should be paid more attention to?

Peter Goosen:

No, I think you might have sensed that in your communications with me, is I actually don't think I've got much to say to you. And I seriously - because I think how we got there is of less importance than what is on the piece of paper that was agreed to, you know?

What was said at the dinner in Geneva, or what was this, or what was - this is, you know, I mean it's interesting for academics, maybe historians and so on. But in terms of the work that needs to be done on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, arms control, all that sort of stuff, that - what is important there is what is it that people committed themselves to. And saying to people, you know, not to just people, to countries to say, "But you committed yourself to these things."

Now, was that commitment genuine? If it was genuine, what are you doing to achieve that commitment? Because if the commitment wasn't genuine, then it begins to undermine the fundamental decision that was taken. Because it was a bargain that was struck at the conference. And so we are going down a road which is, you know, sort of moving along a fairly logical process. And that's what came before, how many papers were written, 15 this and that sort of stuff. This I think -for me who was there - it was not really interesting. You must read a book, I don't know if you've seen the book by a man called Nick van Willigh, do you know him?

Michal Onderco:

The Bomb

Peter Goosen:

Have you heard of his book?

Michal Onderco:

Yes.

Peter Goosen:

Read that. You see a lot of insight into - Nick was on our delegation in '95. He was in the committee dealing with safeguards. And I remember the Swiss person, and I can't remember the name of the Swiss person, but the Swiss person that we spoke to was actually somebody that Nick brought to us to say, "This is somebody you must talk to, he understands this stuff" . And so we had a very interesting meeting with him, because Nick knew him from the IAEA in Vienna and so on. And so his book I think gives an insight into sort of some of the South African thinking on this whole thing, and the psyche that was behind this.

Michal Onderco:

But the book, if I remember correctly, doesn't talk about the conference itself. Or does it?

Peter Goosen:

No, there's parts of it where he talks about.

Michal Onderco:

Okay.

Peter Goosen:

But what I'm saying is if you understand sort of the way that South Africans thought about the sort of changes that took place after the decision was taken, to destroy, the changes that took place in the way of thinking after '94 and '95. I think some of that comes up in there.

Michal Onderco:

Thank you very much for your time and for sharing your knowledge.