



Statements and Speeches

No. 83/21

DISARMAMENT WEEK, OCTOBER 24-30

Statement by the Honourable Allan J. MacEachen, Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa, October 20, 1983.

When United Nations Disarmament Week was conceived in 1978, the objectives were to "increase public awareness of the dangers of the arms race, mobilize public opinion, and create an atmosphere conducive to progress in disarmament negotiations". The first two of these objectives, to a considerable extent, have been realized. While the public has become more aware, and indeed deeply conscious about the largely unfettered pursuit of arms, it has also come to realize the complexity of arms control and disarmament issues. Public opinion without doubt has become engaged on this most vital of subjects. The government, through the Disarmament Fund of the Department of External Affairs, has expended over one-third of a million dollars this year to assist a wide variety of research, public information activities and teaching facilities in Canada, and will increase this amount in the next fiscal year. One major recipient has been the University of Guelph, which will be hosting an international conference from October 27-30, entitled "Strategies for Peace and Security in a Nuclear Age".

As the increasing tensions between the two superpowers have made clear, however, we have a long way to go yet before we reach the third and perhaps most important objective of Disarmament Week. An atmosphere conducive to progress in disarmament requires confidence. But there can be no confidence without understanding and no understanding without dialogue. What is needed today is cool-headed dialogue and that is what Disarmament Week is meant to promote. This applies not only to the superpowers but to everyone who would make a contribution to an improved atmosphere and progress. A further requirement is constructive flexibility of the kind that must be demonstrated by both sides if the important intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF) talks in Geneva are to move forward.

At the Williamsburg Summit conference, Western leaders pledged to devote their "full political resources to reducing the threat of war". Canada, for its part, is prepared to carry out this pledge and to redouble its efforts toward that goal. Canada is already playing a full and active role in various arms control and disarmament negotiations including the MBFR (Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction) talks in Vienna; the Committee on Disarmament in Geneva and at the General Assembly in New York. Progress has been made in some fields including that of chemical weapons where, through Canadian efforts, consensus was reached in Geneva this past summer — for the first time — on a complete document which outlines the elements of a possible comprehensive chemical weapons convention. Canada also intends to play an active part in the forthcoming Conference on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures and Disarmament in Europe, which is to begin in Stockholm and which will address concrete measures designed to reduce the risk of military confrontation in Europe or conflict through miscalculation.

The time has come when each of us must decide what special contribution we can make to create an atmosphere conducive to progress in disarmament. One way Canada can help is by creating the means whereby confidence can be restored and parties assured that promises undertaken in negotiations will