

(Mr. McPhail, Canada)

The Deputy Prime Minister during that address on 1 February said: "The time is right for progress this year toward a treaty on the prohibition of the development, production and stockpiling of chemical weapons and the destruction of existing stocks. We intend to participate vigorously, along with others, in seeking to realize the maximum from the present opportunity". With that reference I need not take the time of this Committee to reiterate that the Government of Canada attaches high priority to the negotiation of a chemical weapons convention. Nor do I intend to discuss today the various negotiating elements of this issue — these are well known to the Committee. Rather, I want very briefly simply to say why Canada considers that this session has the potential to lay the groundwork for the conclusion of a chemical weapons convention, building upon the progress achieved in the chemical weapons Working Group over the past three years.

We must first look back to the words of USSR Foreign Minister Gromyko at the second special session of the General Assembly on disarmament last June when he suggested that Soviet proposals about to be placed before the special session held the potential of a breakthrough on the issue, particularly in the area of verification. Those proposals were submitted to the special session and subsequently were tabled here as document CD/294. At the time of the special session, the Prime Minister of Canada stated that he was encouraged by the positive approach to verification procedures contained in the remarks of the Soviet Foreign Minister. I think we all look forward to discussing the Soviet proposals in detail, and to receiving amplification of them this year in the Committee.

Of equal significance was the intention, indicated by Vice-President Bush in his address to us on 4 February, of the United States Government to submit a detailed paper on the same issue early in this session. That document has now been tabled as CD/343. It is both wide-ranging and forthcoming, and it constitutes a valuable addition to our search for a convention. Not since the joint USA/USSR Report of 1980 tabled as document CD/112, I believe, have we had the opportunity to assess and compare positions which documents CD/294 and CD/343 now afford us. Indeed the parallelism between those documents in a great many areas, ranging from objectives to destruction of stocks, is striking. Both accept, for example, the principle of systematic international on-site inspections, although there are differences on implementation. Nevertheless, it is the common recognition of the principle of and the need for such inspections which is significant. From the Canadian perspective, verification procedures based upon equity, non-discrimination, reciprocity and preservation of national sovereignty can be, and should be, acceptable to all.

Since it is generally recognized that the bulk of chemical weaponry is held by the USSR and the United States and since they have placed proposals before us, the Committee has a special responsibility at this session to ensure that the opportunity to reach significant agreement is not missed.