

Statements by Ministers

I will be monitoring the progress of the Bills and will continue to consult with Opposition House Leaders in the event there are any changes to this agenda.

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POINT OF ORDER

REQUEST FOR MR. SPEAKER'S RULING ON WHAT ARE APPROPRIATE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS IN QUESTION PERIOD

Mr. Ian Deans (Hamilton Mountain): Mr. Speaker, might I prevail upon you to take under advisement the possibility that you may at some point in the not too distant future make a statement to the House with regard to what you, as the Speaker in this House, consider to be both proper questions and answers in terms of the relativity both of the preamble and the question itself, the acceptance of preambles and the appropriateness of answers to be given.

I think it would be very helpful for all Members of the House if it could be clearly understood on both sides what the Speaker would deem to be appropriate and acceptable given that those things have to be flexible, and what you, Sir, would deem to be appropriate and acceptable from those who question and from those who answer.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member for his representation. Most Speakers have at some point in their tenure delivered such an opinion, and I intend to do so.

The Hon. Member will have noticed that I had to smile slightly when he asked me to consider what are proper questions and answers. I do not think he meant quite what those words might imply. I certainly take his meaning, and will be glad to respond as quickly as possible.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

DISARMAMENT

GOVERNMENT POSITION ON ARMS CONTROL NEGOTIATIONS—
STATEMENT OF SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, for Canadians, no duty is more challenging than to contribute constructively to peace among nations. In a world threatened by the spread of arms, we are one country which, decades ago, chose deliberately not to acquire nuclear weapons. We had the capacity. We made the choice, not as a gesture but as a practical contribution to the control of arms. That is part of the character of Canada.

One of the first acts of this Government, Sir, was to reconstitute the Consultative Group on Disarmament and Arms Control Affairs. On October 31, meeting with that group, the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) spelled out six Canadian goals in arms control and disarmament. First, nego-

tiated radical reductions in nuclear forces and the enhancement of strategic stability. Second, maintenance and strengthening of the nuclear non proliferation regime. Third, negotiation of global chemical weapons ban. Fourth, support for a comprehensive test ban treaty. Fifth, prevention of an arms race in outer space. Sixth, the building of confidence sufficient to facilitate the reduction of military forces in Europe and elsewhere.

[Translation]

In a statement to Parliament a year ago I expressed the Government's satisfaction about the fact that the United States and the Soviet Union had agreed to resume negotiations in Geneva. Their decision to meet again and broaden the scope of the agenda to include the prevention of a space arms race and its suppression on earth was an act of confidence and political responsibility. Those negotiations have been going on for the past nine months.

[English]

As I said last year, we should be under no illusion that the course at Geneva will be an easy one. It will be long and arduous. We are encouraged by the signs of progress, in particular, the tabling last fall of detailed American and Soviet proposals which contained some important common features; a 50 per cent reduction of nuclear arsenals, limits on warheads as well as launchers and sublimits on ICBM warheads. We hope that in this international year of peace the experienced negotiators of both sides will be able to enlarge significantly on this common ground. Agreement on an equitable formula for the radical reduction of nuclear forces and on the appropriate relationship between offensive and defensive strategies and systems will remain the key challenges.

We welcome the broad-ranging proposal issued last week by General Secretary Gorbachev and its reaffirmation of the Soviet Union's commitment to nuclear disarmament. That is the most recent in a long history of suggestions by both superpowers on how to achieve general and complete disarmament.

In this context, Sir, conventional arms, where the Soviet Union has an overwhelming superiority, will also have to find their place. The Soviet Union has the opportunity to address this imbalance in its response to the western proposal, tabled in Vienna last month, at the talks on mutual balanced force reductions.

The Soviet Union does not address the issue of missiles deployed in Asia. But we take satisfaction from the fact that Mr. Gorbachev seems to be moving closer to President Reagan's 1981 zero-zero proposal on the elimination of intermediate-range missiles in Europe. The explicit Soviet recognition of the importance of verification in the negotiations of arms control is gratifying, as is the apparent movement toward long-standing western positions on the need for on-site inspection. The exact nature of what the Soviets will accept in this regard will have to be determined. We also note potentially constructive references to issues before other arms control forums.