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DISARMAMENT

Statement by the Minister of National Health and Welfare, and Chairman of the Canadian Delegation to the United Nations General Assembly, Mr. Paul Martin, made in the First Committee.

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We are now engaged in the discussion of one of the most important issues on our agenda.

Other matters on the agenda affect the well-being of larger or smaller groups of persons. But when we are dealing with disarmament, particularly in the thermonuclear age, we are approaching a question which is of immediate and vital concern to all the countries and to all individuals.

In making our contribution in this discussion, we, for our part, will be mindful of the fact that the powers represented at the Foreign Ministers' meeting in Geneva have been at pains to explain that negotiations, while temporarily interrupted, have not been broken off and that they are to be continued through other channels. We think, therefore, that everything we say here should be calculated, if at all possible, to improve the prospects of further discussions on disarmament and to increase the chances of ultimate agreement.

We must realize that there is an increasing element of urgency in the matter. We can no longer be indifferent whether we reach agreement now, or a year, or five years from now. A few years ago, it could have been argued that as long as there was no disarmament, we were the poorer for all the resources that could not be diverted from armaments to peaceful purposes. It could also be argued that armaments, while not originally so much the cause as the result or the symbol of tension, tended in turn to contribute themselves to increasing the atmosphere of suspicion and to become on their own an element of tension. All these considerations remain valid today but now there is an additional reason for urgent action as the stock of nuclear material increases and becomes more widely distributed. In view of the ineffectiveness of presently known methods of control in this field, the prospects of a satisfactory settlement may be increasingly impaired through the passage of time. This is a sobering thought and one which should induce us in all earnestness to grasp all possible means of promoting agreement as soon as possible.

We all recall with what feelings of hope we welcomed the decision last year on the part of the Soviet Union to agree to a resumption of private negotiations in the Disarmament Commission's Sub-Committee. The decision was ratified unanimously by the Assembly just about a year ago. This note of harmony inaugurated, we believed at that time, a new era of greater co-operation which justified the expectation that, in time, humanity might be free from the nightmare of atomic warfare.