



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
OTTAWA - CANADA

No. 71/18

NUCLEAR ENERGY AND WORLD PEACE

An Address by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Mitchell Sharp, to the Fourth International Conference on the Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy, Geneva, September 6, 1971.

It is an honour for me and for my country that I should be the first foreign minister to address one of these important conferences. Canada has a long experience in the development of the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, going back to the late 1940s. The decision to concentrate our resources on this aspect of nuclear science is one we have never regretted and that through the years has enjoyed the support of an overwhelming majority of the Canadian people.

Sixteen years have passed since the first of these conferences opened in this hall. That first conference in 1955 caught the attention of the world and gave rise to great expectations. Until then the words "atomic energy" brought to mind only the mushroom cloud, the firestorm and the helplessness of man in face of this new catastrophic weapon. Until 1955 only a few scientists knew of the technical accomplishments and positive possibilities that had been shrouded in secrecy. It was here, in this Palais des Nations, that the veils were torn away and the world saw that man could use his new knowledge and this new power source as well for his betterment as for his destruction.

The new expectations of 1955 were balanced -- perhaps overbalanced -- by man's continuing fear of the nuclear-weapons race. The public heard about the more fascinating uses of isotopes and about the prospects for megawatts of electrical power, generated by atomic energy. But for most of the next decade much more was heard about "megatons" and "megadeaths" than about megawatts. "Fall-out" was the new plague to be feared and ICBMs were targeted on many of the world's great cities and still are. To the age-old fears of war and oppression was added a new fear, of instant widespread destruction brought about by the pressure of a finger on a button, bringing into doubt the capacity of statesmanship and diplomacy to keep the peace.

In more recent years our fears seem to have diminished. This is the normal human reaction to an ever-present threat; the farmer who tills the slopes of a volcano year after year learns to stop worrying about an eruption that may never come. Our fears have been lulled by our recognition that the two great military powers of the world are for the time being in a state of equilibrium, an equilibrium that neither can disrupt without risking its own, and possibly mankind's, destruction.