



Canada Achieves Breakthrough on Verification Question at UN

The following article was prepared by the Arms Control and Disarmament Division of the Department of External Affairs.

At its first Special Session on Disarmament (UNSSOD I) in 1978, the United Nations General Assembly agreed by consensus in paragraph 91 of the Final Document that: "In order to facilitate the conclusion and effective implementation of disarmament agreements and to create confidence, States should accept appropriate provisions for verification in such agreements."

In paragraph 92 of the Final Document, the General Assembly agreed that: "In the context of international disarmament negotiations, the problem of verification should be further examined and adequate methods and procedures in this field be considered...."

No in-depth examination of the concept of verification has taken place since UNSSOD I. Indeed, it has been argued by some that the question of verification cannot be considered in isolation from specific arms limitation measures.

In recent years, the importance of verification has tended to be minimized by some who have regarded insistence on high levels of verification as a pretext for not engaging in meaningful disarmament negotiations.

The Canadian Government has always regarded verification as a key issue. In 1979, following the adoption of the Final Document, it gave very serious thought to this aspect of the consensus document. Its review of 20 years of arms control and disarmament negotiations confirmed that verification was a central problem which, unfortunately, was often misunderstood.

An arms control agreement is essentially a compromise in which each side bases part or all of its national security on the promises of the other contracting parties rather than on the strength of its

own weaponry. Consequently, reciprocal confidence that all parties will live up to their obligations is essential. Promises of restraint, therefore, have to be accompanied by means to ensure that promises are kept. By confirming that activities which are prohibited by agreements are not taking place and that parties are fulfilling their obligations, verification may help to generate a climate of international confidence. That is indispensable for progress in arms control. In light of these considerations, Canada assigned a high priority to research in the area of verification.

At the second Special Session on Disarmament in 1982, the former Prime Minister of Canada expressed the view that the international community should address itself to verification as one of the most significant factors in disarmament negotiations in the 1980s. As he pointed out at the time, the work on verification should prepare the way for arms control agreements that still lie ahead.

In 1983, the Government gave practical expression to these views when it announced the establishment of a verification research programme with an annual budget of \$1 million. The Canadian programme aims at coming to grips, in very practical ways, with the essential reality of today: the continuing sense of mistrust and the need for an improved climate of confidence, for concrete disarmament commitments and for respect for them.

After unsuccessful attempts in 1980 and 1984 to have the United Nations focus on the question of verification, Canada managed a breakthrough at UNGA 40 when, on December 16, 1985, the United Nations General Assembly adopted by consensus a Canadian-initiated resolution [40/152(0)] entitled *Verification in All its Aspects* which called upon member states:

"to communicate to the Secretary-General, not later than 15 April 1986,

their views and suggestions on verification principles, procedures and techniques to promote the inclusion of adequate verification in arms limitation and disarmament agreements, and on the role of the United Nations in the field of verification...."

In putting forward this resolution, Canada was joined by ten other co-sponsors: Australia, Belgium, Cameroon, Costa Rica, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, Turkey and the United Kingdom. Canada's aim was, first, to set out the picture of what governments had agreed to, by consensus, regarding verification. By having the United Nations reaffirm the provisions on verification contained in the Final Document, Canada hoped to clear the air regarding this concept, to gain a degree of common understanding and to enable the United Nations to initiate some useful groundwork on this subject.

In presenting the draft resolution to the First Committee of the General Assembly, Mr. Douglas Roche, Canadian Ambassador for Disarmament, outlined the long-standing Canadian interest in verification and addressed some of the main concerns that have been expressed about the concept. In defending the generic approach adopted in the resolution, he recognized the validity of the view that verification provisions had to be agreement-specific, but he pointed out that this did not exclude advance work on verification which would produce a source on verification principles, procedures and techniques from which disarmament negotiators might draw.

"It is obvious that verification provisions will always have to be tailored to the purposes, scope and nature of any specific agreement to which they apply. This was recognized in the UNSSOD I Final Document and it is recognized in our draft resolution.

We believe, however, that work should and can be done, in advance, on certain principles, procedures and techniques."