

Greater public understanding

One of the underlying themes of my remarks today has been public understanding, which has been a continuing objective of the Pugwash Movement. The challenge of promoting greater public understanding faces governments and non-governmental organizations alike. In the period between the first and second Special Sessions, there were a number of UN studies designed to improve public understanding. In addition, there was the very thoughtful Report of the Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues chaired by Olof Palme. Canada was active in these endeavours. Robert Ford, the former Canadian Ambassador in Moscow, was a member of the Palme Commission and the Canadian government made a substantial financial contribution to its work. Canadian experts participated in a number of UN disarmament studies. In the case of the study on the relationship between disarmament and development, the government also funded the writing of a popular version of the report, which has now been published commercially in French and English and other languages.

I have no quarrel with those who wish to alert our peoples to the potential horrors of a nuclear war. The objective they seek, a world safe from the threat of a nuclear conflict, is the same goal which the Canadian government pursues by every means at its disposal. We're not always in agreement, however, on how this end can best be achieved. To explain complex negotiating positions to the general public can be exceedingly difficult. Simple declaratory statements are fairly easy to grasp but the potential negative implications for our overall objective — peace and security — are seldom self-evident. Moreover, in my experience, efforts to describe them can often be misunderstood. I very much hope that the Pugwash Movement will play its part, for which it is so eminently suited, in explaining that facile declaratory measures are no substitute for the negotiation of equitable and verifiable arms control and disarmament agreements.

The easy response to the current tensions of the international situation is to argue that only disarmament or only defence fundamentally matters. However, to insist that only one or the other can enhance security and preserve peace is to misunderstand the basic components of security policy. The realistic position is to recognize that disarmament and defence complement and support each other. Our challenge as responsible internationalists is to search for and discover new approaches to a balanced security policy which will both maintain our dedication to our ideals and enable us to move towards a realizable possibility of world peace.

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