

*Nuclear Weapons Free Zone Act*

prevail. For Canada to drop out and say that we will no longer participate or ally ourselves with the democracies is to take a course of action which is foreign to our nature and character and certainly abhorrent to myself and my colleagues.

[Translation]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The Hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for External Affairs.

**Mrs. Suzanne Beauchamp-Niquet (Parliamentary Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for External Affairs):** Mr. Speaker, first of all, I should like to refer you to clause 4 of Bill C-203, and I quote:

The Secretary of State for External Affairs shall, at the earliest opportunity following the coming into force of this Act, propose a motion to the general assembly of the United Nations calling for a world referendum on nuclear disarmament.

Mr. Speaker, Canada does not support the concept of a world referendum on disarmament. In our view, this concept does not allow for the fact that the present situation, as far as disarmament and arms control are concerned, is largely a result of a lack of adequate international safeguards and a lack of confidence among states, factors which, if they did exist, would be able to guarantee national security and independence, even with a reduction in arms levels. However, in view of the absence of such arrangements and the prevailing atmosphere of mutual distrust, only long and difficult negotiations among the parties concerned, and not measures such as a world referendum on disarmament, which does not deal with these fundamental problems, could achieve any results in this area. It is true that effective disarmament requires long and careful negotiations aimed at restoring mutual trust and establishing international mechanisms that would be able to guarantee the security of all states. A world referendum would, of course, give public opinion a chance to speak out in favour of disarmament, but it should not be seen as a substitute for negotiating an international and verifiable agreement.

If the purpose of a referendum is primarily to mobilize public opinion in favour of arms control and disarmament, there are certainly better and more economical ways of achieving this objective. For instance, there should be more research in many areas of arms control and disarmament, and it is equally important to increase efforts to inform and educate the public in order to increase public awareness and understanding of the problems facing us in this area.

In this connection, Mr. Speaker, initiatives that fail to explore for instance, the relation between peace, security and disarmament, would have very little educational value, and considering the cost of organizing such referendum, especially at the world level, we should realize that these resources could be used for a better purpose.

I should add that the Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence of the House of Commons has

examined the position of "Operation Dismantle", according to which Canada should propose to the United Nations that a world referendum be held. In its report, tabled April 8, 1982, the Committee did not support this proposal.

The Canadian Government feels the public has a role to play in the general pursuit of disarmament and arms control, and that the importance of its role will be directly in proportion to its ability to discuss in an informed and intelligent manner the problems we are facing in this area.

The Government is therefore committed to encourage the Canadian people to take an interest and to take part in education, information and research activities related to disarmament.

Since the first United Nations Special Session On Disarmament held in 1978, this commitment has been publicly reaffirmed on many occasions. First of all, it was reflected by the appointment of an ambassador for disarmament, the establishment of a \$150,000 fund to subsidize all public activities in this area, the periodic publication of a bulletin reporting on national and international activities in the area of disarmament and arms control as well as the setting up of an advisory group. Moreover, the increasing support we bring to public participation in these important matters takes various forms: A larger distribution of information material, financial and other support to the activities for the Annual Disarmament Week, the many conferences held throughout the country by departmental officials and the greater priority given to this issue by the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. MacEachen).

● (1740)

During UNSSOD II, it was announced that supplementary funds of \$300,000 would be appropriated during the 1982-83 fiscal year to finance any initiatives in the area of arms control and disarmament. Not only will these funds allow Canada to join in the international exchange of seismological data aimed at supporting the treaty to ban completely nuclear testing and to participate more effectively in the efforts to ban chemical weapons, but they will also be used to considerably increase our research and public information activities.

In the recent throne speech of December 7, the Government announced the creation of a centre financed by public funds whose mission would be to collect, classify and analyse the enormous quantity of data now available on the issues of defence and arms control.

The Government will also increase the amount of funding for disarmament. To this end, \$500,000 are already available for the establishment of a program of compliance with regard to agreements arrived at in the area of disarmament and arms control.

Mr. Speaker, all these concrete and positive government proposals should be viewed as a very valid effort to inform the