



Statements and Speeches

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ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT

A Statement by Mr. G.A.H. Pearson, Representative of Canada to the First Committee of the Thirty-fourth Regular Session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, October 23, 1979

The difference between the goals of disarmament and the realities of international security has always been wide. The common objective of virtually all governments is to achieve undiminished security at lower levels of armaments. Yet our common practice has been to seek greater security at higher levels of armaments. Eighteen months after the Special Session on Disarmament (SSOD), this discrepancy is especially glaring. That session helped to raise the hopes of many people that the dangers of modern weapons and of the arms race would be more fully taken into account in the policies of governments. They have been disappointed. This disappointment may turn into cynicism and indifference unless we are better able to keep these goals and realities in balance. The goals of disarmament can be articulated and explained with greater modesty and realism, without giving them up. Expenditures on defence can be reconciled with initiatives in arms control without the need for apology. History does not bear out the view that peace is always to be found in strength. But neither has it been achieved through weakness. Propaganda and slogans mislead governments as much as they confuse the public.

Of one thing we can be sure, however. A nuclear war involving the weapons now available would destroy civilization as we know it. This has been true for at least a generation. It is this fact which has given special urgency to our annual debate on disarmament, but it is also this fact which has convinced many people that nuclear war will never happen. We all know that this technology cannot be made to disappear. On the contrary, we know that nuclear energy is widely regarded as a possible escape from a situation where traditional sources of energy become inadequate to modern needs. Even if this were not the case, we could not abolish fissionable materials or the knowledge of how to make use of them for weapons purposes. Our immediate tasks are rather to improve means of control of these weapons and associated technologies, and to reduce their numbers by the negotiation of agreements amongst the nuclear weapons powers in the first instance. We hope very much in this respect that China will take its place soon in the Committee on Disarmament.

The U.S.A.-Soviet Treaty on Strategic Offensive Arms of last June is an example of such an agreement. Canada has welcomed the Treaty as a measure to help to ensure the stability of the strategic balance between East and West. We look forward to its coming into force at an early date. In our view, the Treaty will help to minimize the risk of nuclear war, to lay the basis for greater confidence between the major nuclear powers and to encourage further arms control agreements between them. We have noted in particular the fact that the Treaty places restraints on the modernization of strategic offensive systems. We have long believed that such restraints are important
