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Nuclear arms treaty important step forward for our future, Roche

By KENT WALKER
Next week's summit meeting between U.S. President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to sign a nuclear arms agreement is a "major step forward for the world," says Douglas Roche, Canada's ambassador for disarmament.

"The two major powers are actually eliminating one group of nuclear weapons," Mr. Roche said in an interview in Charlottetown. "It's important not just in the act but in what it holds for the future."

The two leaders are also expected to meet in Moscow in 1988 and expect to sign a deal that would eliminate 50 per cent of their countries' nuclear warheads.

"That, I think, would be a real turning point for the world," the ambassador said.

ON SPEAKING TOUR

Mr. Roche, who represents Canada at international meetings on disarmament and heads the Canadian delegation to the disarmament committee at the United Nations, is on a Canada-wide speaking tour.



Douglas Roche speaking at a step forward tour.

The elimination of nuclear weapons is not an impossible task, he said, but it has to be done in stages. Three other countries — England, France and China — have nuclear weapons, but the United States and the Soviet Union have by far the majority. If they can eliminate their weapons or reduce them by a large amount, the other countries could follow suit, he said.

"On the surface, it seems a hard goal to reach, but I wouldn't give up on it," Mr. Roche said. "I'm determined to get as much gain (on disarmament) as I can."

President Reagan's term ends in 1993 and Canadians can only hope the next president will sense the mood of the people and continue the move toward disarmament, Mr. Roche said.

As for Mr. Gorbachev, it's in Canada's best interest to promote and strengthen him because he is pushing for social and economic reform, which are also needed for disarmament, he said.

PROTESTS FEWER

Protests against nuclear arms seem to occur less frequently now

than they did two or three years ago and that's probably because people realize now something is being done about the weapons. The protests have made a difference, Mr. Roche said. World leaders are realizing that most people are fed up with the arms race and want it to end.

"There's more hope now than ever before," he said. "The nuclear arms race is still going on, but I sense an increasing number of people want to end it. It's a noisy picture, but I think that an increasing number of people realize the world has reached a turning point. We've got to find a way down from this escalation point or we're not going to survive."

Mr. Roche said a nuclear arms-free world is not impossible, although it will not happen overnight.

There were many frustrating moments when Mr. Roche first became a disarmament spokesman four years ago, but there is a real movement now that may make it possible to eliminate nuclear weapons, he said.

"You've got to go beyond the day-to-day happenings or the frustration level will be too high."

He compared the disarmament movement to the people who built the great cathedrals in Europe that sometimes took 100 years or more to build. Many of the builders never got to see the full results of their efforts, but knew what they were working toward was worthwhile.

WON'T GIVE UP

"I myself will never give up until the world is nuclear free," he said.

In a speech Wednesday night in Charlottetown at a public forum on disarmament, Mr. Roche said nations arm because they feel their security is threatened. Only when the threat to security is lessened is real disarmament possible, he said.

"Thus our purpose must be to increase real security — for individual nations and for the world — by finding politically possible ways to spend less money on arms and more on development."

The Reykjavik summit between Gorbachev and President Reagan has laid the groundwork for concrete accomplishments in disarmament, stability and peace, he said.

"This is the moment the world has been waiting for and must be seized by the international community to support and reinforce the bilateral efforts at nuclear reductions. This is indeed the ongoing work of Canada."