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Statements and Speeches

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ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT

A Statement on October 27, 1977, in the First Committee of the Thirty-Second Session of the United Nations General Assembly by Mr. R. Harry Jay, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada to the Office of the United Nations at Geneva and to the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament.

In his address to the General Assembly on September 26, 1977, the Secretary of State for External Affairs of Canada stated that: "...no problem is of greater concern to the United Nations than disarmament, but equally no subject has more frustrated our efforts and disappointed our peoples". I recall also that in the debate in the First Committee last year I expressed a sense of impatience, frustration and profound disappointment at the continuing failure of the international community to face up more concretely and rapidly to the awesome problems that confront us in the field of disarmament. Disappointing as achievements have been up to now, when we come to examine the current situation we do find that there are grounds for greater optimism in at least three crucial areas. In these areas efforts have been accelerated and intensified, with the result that opportunities for major progress may at last be in sight.

These developments do not, of course, give grounds for any complacency. The task of nurturing these possibilities to the stage of fruition is bound to take time. This fact does not diminish but heightens our sense of urgency. As a result of the persistent efforts of the international community to enhance international security through arms-limitation and disarmament measures, we now are on a threshold of important developments. The success of this enterprise will depend on the intensity of the effort — particularly by all militarily-significant states — in the next few years.

First and foremost, in terms of the proliferation of nuclear weapons in the arsenals of the super-powers, the ongoing efforts of the United States and the Soviet Union to reach agreement on a series of further measures to curb, and then to reverse, the strategic-arms race are of crucial importance. It is the strongly-held view of Canada that these bilateral negotiations between the two major nuclear powers must, as their ultimate objective, endeavour to attack the problem in qualitative as well as quantitative terms — that is, seek to curb the technological-arms race, as well as limit and reduce the numbers of nuclear weapons.

A short while ago, the United States and the Soviet Union announced separately their intention to continue to be governed by the provisions of the now-expired SALT I strategic-arms limitation agreement. In order to preserve a measure of stability while negotiations continued for the long-delayed follow-on agreement, SALT II, which should be a significant first step in the actual reduction of nuclear arsenals. It is particularly important that the negotiations on SALT II, and on certain interim supplementary restraints, are now being pursued with renewed vigour.

No one who is aware of the serious problems involved in such negotiations, relating to

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Strategic arms-
limitation talks
(SALT)