



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
OTTAWA - CANADA

No. 48/57

STATEMENT ON ATOMIC ENERGY (II)

A statement by Gen. A.G.L. McNaughton, Canadian representative on the Atomic Energy Commission, at the Plenary meeting of the General Assembly of the United Nations at Paris, on November 4, 1948.

In the course of the long debate on atomic energy which has taken place in this Assembly, the issues have been made quite clear. I wish now to re-state in the form of a series of brief propositions the position which the Canadian Government holds in regard to atomic energy, and because of which the Canadian delegation will give its full support to this resolution.

In the first place, the Canadian Government believes that it is possible to establish a practicable system for the control of atomic energy which will protect the nations of the world from the dangers of atomic war and which will give freedom to use atomic energy for peaceful purposes. This belief is demonstrated by the time and attention which the Canadian delegation has devoted to the work of the Atomic Energy Commission and it is demonstrated also by the anxiety of the Canadian Government that the work of the Commission should continue and that the difficulties standing in the way of agreement between nations should be removed. Canada possesses, as is well known, extensive resources of the raw materials from which atomic energy may be derived, and Canadian scientists and engineers have acquired special skills and knowledge in the field. These conditions made possible for Canada a considerable national development of atomic energy. We believe nevertheless that full benefits can come only through the organization of this development on an international rather than on a national basis.

My second proposition is the following: atomic warfare cannot be prohibited nor the international development of atomic energy ensured except on a basis which provides proper security for all nations. The principles through which these two objectives may be realized have been set forth in the majority reports of the Atomic Energy Commission. These principles have been arrived at by a long and arduous process of study and discussion in which representatives of seventeen nations have been engaged. Fourteen nations have agreed in the majority reports and only three have dissented. The Canadian Government, which was represented in the discussions in which these principles were evolved, adheres to them firmly, and confidently recommends their acceptance to other members of the United Nations as the "necessary basis" from which progress can be made towards the solution of the complicated problems of the prevention of atomic warfare and the freeing of the world's resources of atomic energy for peaceful purposes.

In the third place, the Canadian Government believes that the stage has been reached in the work of the Atomic Energy Commission where, before further significant progress can be made, clear direction must be given to the Commission by the Assembly. It was from this General Assembly in its first session that it derived its original mandate. The resolution which is now before the General Assembly gives confirmation to the con-

clusions which have already been accepted by a majority of the members of the Commission. On the strength of this resolution it will be possible for the members of the Commission to return to their task and to proceed to such further studies as are practicable in the confidence that they will have the support which comes from the acceptance, by a majority of the nations of the world, of the basic conclusions which they have already reached.

Before the Atomic Energy Commission can go far in this work, however, it will be necessary to clear the ground of present difficulties and misunderstandings which make agreement on principles impossible amongst the Powers most directly concerned. It is therefore proposed in this resolution that the nations which, by reason of their special concern, first brought the question of the control of atomic energy to the attention of the United Nations and who are referred to as the "sponsors", shall consult together to determine if there exists a basis on which the work of the Atomic Energy Commission may be pressed forward to completion by the preparation of a draft treaty or convention. The sponsors will, of course, be required to consider this problem in all its aspects. Speaking for the Canadian delegation, it is our intention to press for a meeting of the sponsors at the earliest possible moment, and to press also that representation of the six nations at this meeting shall be on the high level appropriate to the consideration and resolution of the political difficulties which exist. If, as a result of these consultations, the sponsors are able to report back to the Assembly, either in a regular session or, if necessary, in a special session, that some clarification or adjustment of the existing position will enable the world to proceed towards a solution of the problem of the control of atomic energy, the Canadian delegation will be the first to welcome that development and give its support in the Assembly to a directive which might then be issued by the Assembly to the Atomic Energy Commission. In the meantime the Canadian delegation will use its best endeavours to contribute to such work as the Atomic Energy Commission may find it useful and practicable to undertake. I would like to make it quite clear that we believe the sponsors should have the responsibility of removing the political difficulties so that the Commission may proceed with the solution of the technical difficulties which are outstanding.

My final proposition is this. The problem of atomic energy is so complicated and the issues are so fateful that the world must not be led into the belief that any simple solution is adequate. This is our serious and honest objection to the Soviet proposal, which we consider to represent an oversimplification of the grave problems at issue. The processes for the preparation of the materials which release atomic energy are long and complicated and costly. The process by which these materials are assembled in an atomic bomb is quick and relatively simple; it is the same material that serves for peaceful uses in the arts and sciences or for destruction, and as a consequence every step of the process from the time the ores are first separated from the ground must be controlled. The world will be free from the danger of atomic warfare only if the whole process from beginning to end is placed within the framework of an adequate system of control and development. It is because of the absence of this effective control that we are convinced that the proposal which the Soviet delegation has made is quite inadequate to give the assurance of security which the nations of the world require.

Our position, which has been stated in detail by the Canadian delegation in the Political Committee of this Assembly and elsewhere, is held in the serious belief that it gives not only the best but the only hope of relieving humanity from fear of atomic warfare, and of giving freedom for the development of atomic energy for peaceful purposes. We shall vote for this resolution not with any sense that we have reached an

end in the process of negotiation on the subject of the control of atomic energy, but for the purpose of marking a first stage which we hope will constitute the necessary basis for further progress.

I come now to the amendments which have been proposed by the distinguished representative of India, and I am very glad that these are before us, because they give a useful opportunity for further clarification of the situation and further explanations to this Assembly of some of the important considerations developed in the Atomic Energy Commission and in the Security Council, which are relevant.

The first amendment proposes that the words "in substance" should be inserted in the first paragraph of the resolution as it has come to this Assembly from the Political Committee.

The effect of the insertion of these words in the manner proposed by India would, in the opinion of the Canadian delegation, be unfortunate. In the reports in question and in the light of this present knowledge of the facts, the members of the Commission have sought to give the greatest precision possible to the conclusions which are set forth. In every case where our studies in the Commission have indicated that qualifications and explanations are needed for the better understanding of any of the conclusions, these have been given in the text of the report. I feel sure that all the members of the Commission who have co-operated in the preparation of the majority report will join with me in regretting any rewording of the resolution which would have the effect of unnecessarily reducing the definiteness of those parts of the report where it has been found possible to be definite. To do so would, we think, make these difficult matters even more difficult of understanding, and the reports would therefore be less useful as the preliminary basis for our studies on the other sections of our programme of work.

I believe that the reason underlying this proposed amendment may be a feeling that definite and final conclusions have been recorded; that final definite commitments are being requested at this time of the nations gathered here in this General Assembly.

As the distinguished delegate of India pointed out this morning, this is not so; and in this connection I would like to draw particular attention, as she did, to the resolution which was passed by the Security Council at its 117th meeting on 10th March 1947 when it dealt with the first report of the Atomic Energy Commission and when it instructed the Commission of its second report.

The relevant paragraph of this Security Council resolution reads as follows:

"Recognizes that any agreement expressed by the member of the Council to the separate portions of the report is preliminary, since final acceptance of any part by any nation is conditioned upon its acceptance of all parts of the control plan in its final form".

The receipt of this instruction from the Security Council by the Atomic Energy Commission is recorded on page 2 of the Commission's second report in the following words:

"In accordance with its terms of reference, contained in the General Assembly resolution of 24th January 1946, and in accordance with the resolution of the Security Council of 10th March 1947, the Commission undertook the drafting of specific proposals, etc."

The General Assembly will thus observe that the Commission has accepted the Security Council's resolution of 10th March 1947, and that

the terms of this resolution qualify not only the recommendations given in the second report, but that they are also binding in any further work which may be undertaken.

In consequence, I hope it is clear that every nation is fully protected in every matter at this stage, where we are endeavouring to complete each of the several various separate portions of our studies.

When these separate portions are each completed to the preliminary stage, they will be brought together and a process of correlation and coordination will undoubtedly be required.

Right up to the final negotiation of the Treaty and to its signatures and ratification, every nation will maintain its full rights against any clause or provision to which it may hold objection.

Now, as regards the second amendment proposed by India. The effect of this, in our opinion, would be to ask the Commission to proceed now to the drafting of a Treaty incorporating its ultimate proposals.

In the absence of the political agreement, which does not, unfortunately, at present exist, and which we will seek through the mechanism of the meetings of the sponsors, as we have proposed, the India amendment, if accepted, would require that the Commission proceed by majority vote to prescribe the precise terms of this Treaty or convention.

In my earlier remarks I indicated that I felt that this would be premature, and that its probable effect would be to accentuate differences, to harden positions, and to awake immediate anxieties rather than to clarify understandings and promote the universal agreement which must, in the end, be reached if the civilizations of the world are to be saved from disaster.

We feel that premature action to force decisions would be unfortunate and that, while the Commission should undertake all the work which, in its judgment, it can usefully undertake, it should not be forced to embark on processes which would make ultimate agreement less easy.

For these reasons, Mr. President, the Canadian delegation are unable to give their support to the amendments proposed by India and we will, as I have said, vote for the resolution in the form in which it has come to us from our First Committee. May I say again that I am very glad that the proposal of the delegation of India has given me this opportunity for further explanation.
