

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES



INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
OTTAWA - CANADA

No. 61/17 A PLEA FOR RENEWED DISARMAMENT TALKS

An address by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Mr. Howard C. Green, to the First Committee of the United Nations on November 24, 1961.

Since disarmament negotiations were broken off in June 1960 -- that is, almost a year and a half ago -- we have seen the arms race accelerated and the tensions which go with it greatly increased. Some believe increased tensions are an obstacle to disarmament negotiations. I draw a different conclusion. I believe that developments in the last few months in Berlin, as well as the breakdown of the moratorium on nuclear-weapons testing, have demonstrated more clearly than ever the urgency of resuming disarmament negotiations.

The universal concern over this very dangerous trend has been clearly reflected in various debates right from the commencement of this sixteenth session of the General Assembly. A number of resolutions already adopted have called for action to reverse that trend. I think it is a very encouraging development that such efforts have had a positive effect. For example, Canada warmly welcomes the announcement that nuclear-tests negotiations are now to be resumed. I regard this decision as the direct outcome of action which the Assembly has taken to focus attention on the dangers of nuclear-weapons testing.

Three years of careful study at Geneva brought the three nuclear powers together on all but a few points. Now early agreement on a treaty for the permanent cessation of tests would be a major achievement in itself. It would also be a first significant step toward the goal of general disarmament.

The action taken on nuclear testing must be reinforced by immediate steps to bring about a resumption of negotiations on the question of general disarmament. We cannot let the present Assembly go without achieving this goal.

Groundwork Laid

This summer, private consultations between the United States and the Soviet Union laid the groundwork. As we are all aware, those talks brought about agreement on a set of basic principles for the guidance of future negotiations on disarmament.

This Committee has already taken a practical step toward the actual resumption of disarmament talks by unanimously endorsing resolution A/C.1/L.299, which welcomed agreement on these principles and urged these two great nations to agree on a negotiating body.

As yet there is no agreement on how these basic principles should be translated into practice. I have no desire today to gloss over the differences. Indeed, on the important matter of verification methods, we must admit frankly that the two sides are still a long way apart. I believe such difficulties can be resolved in the course of detailed negotiations. The results which the United States and the Soviet Union were able to achieve last summer are proof that conflicting viewpoints can be brought together through careful and painstaking efforts.

The only remaining obstacle to resumed negotiations is the lack of agreement on the composition of the forum in which disarmament will actually be negotiated. To speak very frankly, I cannot for the life of me see why the problem of composition should constitute a barrier to the resumption of negotiations.

The question, after all, is a simple one. All of us surely want to devise a negotiating group which will meet two objectives: first, to give the major military powers an opportunity for detailed discussions; second, to ensure that the interest of all states in disarmament is adequately reflected.

A Practical Arrangement

At the fifteenth session of the General Assembly last year, I expressed the conviction that a group in which the two sides would face one another is a practical and effective arrangement. Our re-examination of the problem of composition in recent weeks has confirmed us in this belief. However, we are also convinced that the participation of additional countries with a fresh perspective would be of great value. It is not for me to suggest which states should fulfil this role. However, it seems clear that it would be desirable for them to be chosen from areas of the world which have not been represented on the negotiating group.

At the last session of the General Assembly, Canada advanced proposals designed to broaden the representative character of the negotiating group and to increase its effectiveness. At that time, my delegation suggested the addition to the Ten-Nation Disarmament Committee of a chairman, vice-chairman and a rapporteur -- all to come from countries other than the ten. However, strong arguments have been advanced in this debate to the effect that any additional members over and above the ten should be not officers but full participants in the work of the negotiating committee, and I agree that that would be a better plan.

Suggestions for Composition

To meet the requirement for a more representative composition, provision should be made for participation by the main geographical regions not already represented, namely Africa, Asia and Latin America. We might agree, for example, on an expanded committee of 13 (although in Canada 13 is an unlucky number, perhaps in this case it would be a very lucky one) or 16, by adding one or two representatives from each of these areas to the ten powers which were engaged in the negotiations in Geneva.

This would still leave open the important matter of selecting a presiding officer. We have two suggestions and, of course, there may well be others. One possibility would be to appoint the Chairman of the Disarmament Commission as chairman of this negotiating group. This could be a helpful choice, not only because the present incumbent of that office is well qualified, but because an ex officio appointment of this kind would provide continuity. Alternatively, a chairman might appropriately be chosen from one of the delegations newly represented on the committee, that is, from the three or six additional countries, if there should be six, added to the ten. It would be understood, of course, that his service in this capacity of chairman would not interfere with his country's full participation in the negotiations. So much for composition.

Reporting to UN

My delegation holds the view that, no matter what negotiating body is decided upon, it should have a close and effective relationship with the United Nations as a whole. The question of disarmament is obviously of vital interest to all members of the organization, large and small, no matter from what continent they happen to come. Whatever smaller group may be nominated to carry on detailed negotiations, there would be great value in making provision for regular reports from that body to the United Nations Disarmament Commission; and, as we know, the negotiating Committee of Ten was not set up by the United Nations but by the Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Geneva.

It might also prove desirable, as negotiations proceed, to consider establishing United Nations committees to study specific aspects of disarmament which may require examination from a regional or a specialized point of view. The establishment of such committees would not only serve to speed up the study of certain problems but would offer an opportunity for the participation of further members of the United Nations in a detailed consideration of disarmament. We believe there are various fields which could be studied by special committees of the United Nations.

I offer these various suggestions in the hope that they may assist in the search for common ground. I repeat that the problem of composition is not so difficult that it need delay the resumption of negotiations. Whatever agreement may be reached, the fundamental point is not a question of numbers but of determination to get on with the job of actual negotiations. By unanimously adopting resolution A/C.1/L.299, to which I have already referred, and which was sponsored by India, Ghana and the United Arab Republic, we have urged the United States and the Soviet Union to agree on the question of composition. The attention of all members of this Committee is focused on the talks between those two countries. We are united in the hope that the United States and the Soviet Union will soon be able to report agreement on this question of composition. I think it is perfectly clear that the responsibility for the next move rests with these two great powers, the United States and the Soviet Union, and I most honestly plead with them that they reach agreement quickly on a forum in which these negotiations could be carried on.

The resumption of negotiations in a suitable forum would constitute only the first step, of course, on the road to disarmament. A full range of measures that will require negotiation is dealt with in the detailed proposals which have been put forward by the two sides; and we are in the position that both sides have already put in their disarmament proposals.

A Major Development

I believe that one major development since disarmament was discussed in the last session of the General Assembly has been the preparation of a new disarmament programme, submitted to the Assembly by the President of the United States on 25 September. Canada participated throughout in the preparation of that disarmament plan and it has our full support.

The first stage of these new proposals contains far-reaching measures of disarmament. This is an important advance. From the outset, under those proposals, provision is made for extensive reductions of nuclear armaments and their means of delivery. Canada attaches the greatest importance to provisions to deal effectively with these most dangerous modern nuclear weapons. There are, of course, parallel measures for the reduction of so-called conventional armaments, and they are equally significant if the principle of balance between the two great powers is to be maintained.

In addition to providing for significant measures at the earliest possible time, these new proposals accept without reservation the commitment to continue until a total programme of general disarmament has been achieved; in other words, to guard against this starting and stopping and provide for steady continuation of the negotiations. The need for a commitment of that kind was emphasized in the statement of

principles adopted by the Commonwealth Prime Ministers last spring, and I quote the significant paragraph from the communique of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Meeting:

"Once started, the process of disarmament should be continued without interruption until it is completed."

This same obligation was also expressly recognized by both sides in the joint statement of principles on 20 September.

The new proposals also give considerable attention to effective procedures for maintaining the peace. It is a most important step forward that the requirement for effective international peace-keeping machinery has been given full recognition in the statement of principles agreed between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Disarmament and Peace Machinery

To the Canadian Government (and I am sure this is true of other governments), it is obvious that there is a close connexion between the progressive reduction of national armaments and the strengthening of international arrangements to keep the peace. We recognize that this question is one that will require much closer consideration in order to find a generally acceptable solution. Indeed, my delegation considers that it would be desirable to have all aspects of this problem studied by a special body to be set up for this purpose within the United Nations. In other words, while we go ahead with negotiations on disarmament let us be moving at the same time for the setting up of peace-keeping machinery.

Finally, the new proposals represent a genuine attempt to take account of earlier Soviet positions. They have been carefully balanced to make quite certain that their adoption would not result in a military advantage for any one state or group of states. Moreover, they are not presented on a take-it-or-leave-it basis but as a contribution to constructive negotiations.

It would not be profitable for me to go further at this time into questions of detail. My purpose in raising them today has been to emphasize once again that the foundation on which constructive negotiations can be built already exists. We have agreement on basic principles; we are easily within reach of an understanding on the question of composition; and we have detailed proposals from both sides which have a number of significant elements in common. We must seize the opportunity we now have to get down quickly to the actual consideration of a full programme of disarmament.

Each one of us here is under a moral obligation to our own and to future generations to find a speedy and a lasting solution to this vital question of disarmament. It involves not only reducing arms and eventually getting rid of them, but it also involves putting a stop to the development of new and more deadly weapons. There are two angles to it: disarmament and, at the same time, stopping the arms race.

I do not believe we should be discouraged. The United Nations is no place for a pessimist. Coming from Ottawa, it is very easy for me to come down here in a matter of an hour or an hour and a half; sometimes it takes longer to get from Idlewild Airport to the United Nations Building than it does to get from Ottawa to the airport. It is therefore possible to come down frequently.

I believe that the meetings of this Committee and the meetings of the General Assembly and the meetings of the other Committees at the sixteenth session have already accomplished a great deal. Do you remember, Mr. Chairman, what terrific tension there was when we came here (was it on 19 September?) and everyone was afraid that a nuclear war might break out overnight or over the week-end? Tension could not have been much greater than it was at that time. The very fact that the United Nations General Assembly met started the reduction of that tension.

As the debates have gone on in the weeks which have followed, I believe there has been a steadily-decreasing amount of tension, and we should not be discouraged. I think we are really getting something done which is very much worth while.

Here, today, we are discussing what is really the key problem facing the United Nations: disarmament and stopping the nuclear weapons race. If we can succeed in that, then we can get on to the dozens of other things there are to do to help people build up their countries, to improve the lot of humanity -- all these things that are worth while and that are not destructive but are constructive. This, of course, is what we all really want. No one here wants to be wasting a lot of time talking about weapons and disarmament and all that sort of business. We have to do it because of existing conditions.

Here, now, we have a chance on this disarmament question to get something really worth while under way and I hope that the United States and the Soviet Union will agree on a forum. After all, there is not much difference between 13 and 18 or 20 -- it is really a numbers game. Let them agree on that and let the rest of us offer our full co-operation. Some of us would be on the negotiating body, others would not, but they could perhaps work on a committee which was studying some particular subject; in any event it is important that whatever countries are going to do the negotiating will have

the great interest and the abiding goodwill of all the other countries, because we all have so much at stake. As I have said here before it may be a question of whether civilization continues or whether the whole world blows up. Here is the key problem in trying to see that mankind follows the only sensible alternative of these two alternatives.

If we take this attitude, I am confident that the results may surprise even the most optimistic delegates here today.

S/C