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SPECIAL POLITICAL COMMITTEE

ITEM 75: INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION IN THE
PEACEFUL USES OF OUTER SPACE

STATEMENT DELIVERED BY
RICHARD TÊTU
CANADIAN ALTERNATE REPRESENTATIVE
TO THE SIXTH COMMITTEE
NOVEMBER 16, 1989

Mr. Chairman,

The question of the peaceful uses of outer space is one to which my country attaches a great deal of importance. The Canadian Space Agency, created earlier this year, has as one of its objectives the fostering of such peaceful uses. Creating our space agency highlights the importance we attach to a space program, more than a quarter century old, built by developing applications to serve practical needs. Canadians recognized that distance, rugged terrain and atmospheric disturbances that are common at high latitudes made the usual methods of communication and resource monitoring inefficient. In response to the challenges of our geography and environment we have developed strong capabilities in remote sensing and space telecommunications. As a result, space technologies are now integrated into the Canadian infrastructure, and are used routinely in telephone, television and data transmissions and in forest management, mineral exploration and agriculture.

Canada is presently embarking on a program to bring a new remote sensing tool to the world community. On 13 September the Canadian Government announced that it would proceed with the development of Radarsat, Canada's first remote sensing satellite. Radarsat, to be launched in 1994, will provide valuable economic and scientific information on ice conditions, crops, forests and geological formations. The satellite's ability to collect data through darkness and cloud will be particularly useful in penetrating the almost constant cloud cover of the equatorial rain forests and coastal regions. The satellite will also be used for global environmental monitoring and surveillance of natural disasters including floods, droughts, forest fires and other such phenomena. The USA which is planning to cooperate in the project, will provide a launch for Radarsat in return for data to support US Government programs.

It is clear to us that the solutions we will find to our problems through Radarsat, will also have applications in other countries. We remain committed to sharing our insights and knowledge. In particular, we have worked both bilaterally and through our activities here at the United Nations to strengthen the capabilities of developing countries to use space technologies to deal with their own unique situations. Last February, Canada organized a seminar for developing countries on the use of new technologies in remote sensing and geographical information systems to complement consideration of this year's special theme of the scientific and technical sub-committee:

space technology as an instrument for combatting environmental problems, particularly those of the developing countries.

Mr. Chairman,

Canada considers that the Committee on the Peaceful uses of Outer Space plays an important role in fostering international cooperation and in creating the international legal and political framework to support the increased use of space for the benefit of mankind. We strongly support therefore the work of the Committee. We recognize as well the importance of international cooperation in space. In Montreal last May Canada signed a 10 year cooperative agreement with the European Space Agency, which builds on the formal cooperation between Canada and ESA begun 10 years earlier. As well, at this very moment in Vancouver, Canadian and Japanese officials are meeting to participate in the first Canada-Japan space panel, created by our two countries to improve space cooperation.

Mr. Chairman,

Canada shares the concerns of several delegations about the possible extension of an arms race into outer space. We remain committed to preventing this, and believe that the proper forum for negotiations to prevent such an arms race is the conference on disarmament.

Mr. Chairman,

As we review the work of the Committee on Outer Space for this year it has become clear to us that some significant progress has been achieved. On the key aspects of use of nuclear power sources in space, substantive discussion took place in both the Scientific and Technical and Legal Sub-committees, which I will comment in more detail later.

My delegation supports the Committee's recommendation that the General Assembly endorse the initiative of international space organizations and bodies to designate 1992 as an international space year. Canada is planning activities for 1992 that will build on our interest and expertise in remote sensing, and we look forward to cooperating with other countries in the International Space Year.

The Legal Sub-committee addressed its new agenda item. We welcome the consensus that was achieved on establishing a working group to consider the issue of outer space benefits. Canada recognizes the importance of the new item and will work

seriously with member countries to address this very important topic.

Mr. Chairman,

I would now like to return to a topic of major importance to Canada, the use of nuclear power sources in space. As I noted earlier some important progress took place during the past year. The active participation of experts from many countries was important to this, and we believe, is leading to a better understanding. This week's meeting of experts in Cologne should also be useful in clarifying remaining issues. In the discussions of the Legal Sub-committee on NPS we are most concerned with progress on principle three, the principle dealing with guidelines on criteria for safe use. The elements of a consensus are before the Sub-committee. What we need now is the political will to pull the elements together.

In our view, principle three must find a balance between two concerns. The guidelines must be sufficiently flexible that users of nuclear power sources will not be stifled in their ongoing development on NPS systems over the years. On the other hand, principle three cannot be so general as to be meaningless with regard to international safety criteria. It is clear to us that a general reference to accepted international radiation protection guidelines is not sufficient. It fails the second test noted above because the lengthy and ambiguous documents involved would allow nuclear power source users to enjoy a completely free hand. Reference to relevant guidelines must be coupled with specific limits relevant to the situation of nuclear power sources in outer space. As we proposed in working papers during the last year, during normal operations of nuclear powered spacecraft there should be no radiological exposure in territories beyond the launching staff. Any state opposing this principle is in effect accepting the planned deposit on its territory of radiation from nuclear power sources.

Mr. Chairman,

It is not sufficient to consider only planned missions involving nuclear powered spacecraft. Our guidelines must also influence designs affecting the outcome in unplanned situations. In other words, we cannot by considering planned missions only give designers of nuclear power sources a free hand to ignore safety considerations in scenarios where control of the nuclear power source has been lost and an uncontrolled return to earth. Canada proposed that designers consider these

accident cases and aim to limit radiation resulting from them to one milli-sievert per year - a goal taken directly from the present thinking of the ICRP. Such an approach takes us beyond the difficult debate of the relative merits of one method or the other for coping with accidents and focusses the Committee's attention where we believe it should be - on developing guidelines that protect the earth's citizens. It has the additional advantage of allowing designers to find the best solutions relevant to their particular system.

We offer this approach in the sincere hope that it can lead us out of previous impasses. It is not too technical, and it achieves a balance between flexibility on the one hand and workable, effective safety criteria on the other. It allows users of nuclear power sources to find their own effective measures to achieve certain defined levels of safety, and it ensures that designers are not able to completely ignore the consequences of accident situations. Finally, it precludes the planned disposal of nuclear power sources through uncontrolled re-entry of these space objects to earth. We look forward to working with other delegations to achieve consensus on the issue.

In meetings of the Sub-committees in the past year, the growing problem of space debris has been raised by many delegations as a source of concern to many delegations. This explains why, Canada, along with Australia, the Federal Republic of Germany, Nigeria, the Netherlands and Sweden have proposed to add their issue as an agenda item for the Scientific and Technical Sub-committee. We also look forward to further discussing the issue in the year to come.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, we pledge our continuous support to the work of the Committee and hope that laws and institutions will adapt to meet the growing challenge of the peaceful use of outer space.

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