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Disarmament: Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and Related Disarmament Problems

Text of Statement to be delivered in the First Committee by the Canadian Representative, General E. L. M. Burns, on Tuesday, October 19, 1965.

In beginning to discuss the vital problem of preventing the further spread of nuclear weapons, we cannot do better than quote from the memorandum on this subject by the eight non-aligned members of the ENDC. This is document ENDC/158 of 15 September, 1965, and is included in document A/5986. The parts of this memorandum which we think this committee should particularly note are the following:

"The Disarmament Commission of the United Nations adopted Resolution DC/225 on 15 June, 1965, with an overwhelming majority and, inter alia, 'convinced that failure to conclude a universal treaty or agreement to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons leads to the most serious consequences', recommended that the Eighteen-Nation Disarmament Committee should 'also accord special priority to the consideration of the question of a treaty or convention to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons, giving close attention to the various suggestions that agreement could be facilitated by adopting a programme of certain related measures.' ... The delegations of the NATO countries represented in the Committee have submitted a draft treaty on non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. The non-aligned delegations regret, however, that it has not yet been possible to reconcile the various approaches for an appropriate or adequate treaty on non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. ... A treaty on non-proliferation of nuclear weapons is not an end in itself but only a means to an end. That end is the achievement of General and Complete Disarmament, and, more particularly, nuclear

disarmament. The eight delegations are convinced that measures to prohibit the spread of nuclear weapons should, therefore, be coupled with or followed by tangible steps to halt the nuclear arms race and to limit, reduce and eliminate the stocks of nuclear weapons and the means of their delivery."...

The Draft treaty on non-proliferation referred to in the non-aligned nations' memorandum is, of course, that which was tabled by the USA delegation on 17 August, 1965. Its principal purpose is to give effect to the recommendation of Resolution 1665 (XVI) and that of Resolution 225 of the UNDC, para 2(c), calling for a treaty or convention to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons. The essence of the USA draft treaty (which is available to the Committee as an attachment to the report of the ENDC A/5986) is contained in the words in Article I. "Each of the nuclear States party to this Treaty undertakes not to ... take any action which would cause an increase in the total number of States or other organizations having independent power to use nuclear weapons." The wording of Article II imposes a similar obligation on the non-nuclear States Party to the Treaty. On 24 September, 1965, the Foreign Minister of the USSR submitted a draft treaty on non-proliferation. The spokesmen of the USA and the USSR have explained the provisions of their respective draft treaties, so I shall confine my remarks in this regard to examining the divergencies between "the various approaches for an appropriate or adequate treaty" which they reveal.

If we compare the respective first articles in the two drafts, which are intended to specify the undertakings of the nuclear powers parties to the treaty, we find the following. The USSR draft is intended not only to prevent any nation emerging as a new independent nuclear power (as the USA draft does) but it also is intended to prevent, as we understand it, any new organization being set up within an alliance or other group of states with the independent power to use nuclear weapons. It further would appear designed to prohibit certain defensive arrangements which now exist within the NATO alliance. Under these existing arrangements certain nuclear weapon delivery vehicles of limited range in the hands of allies of the USA could be used to deliver nuclear weapons in order to repel aggression. The nuclear weapons, however, are kept under the close custody of USA personnel only. Their use would require both a decision by the other government that it wished to use the weapons, and a separate decision by

the USA government to release weapons from its own custody for use by that other government. These arrangements which of course are entirely defensive in character thus ensure that the United States retains not only the right but also the physical means to prevent the use of such weapons and accordingly in no way constitute proliferation.

If these arrangements were abolished, moreover it would be of one-sided advantage to the USSR and its allies. It would weaken NATO defences, with no corresponding reduction of the immense destructive potentiality of the nuclear weapons with their means of delivery possessed by the USSR. Thus the proposal set out in treaty language in Article I of the USSR draft would contravene the principle for disarmament negotiations, jointly agreed by the USA and the USSR and endorsed by the UNGA in Res. 1722 (XVI) that no measure of disarmament should confer a military advantage on any state or group of states. It seems clear that in its present form this provision of the USSR draft does not constitute a suitable basis for negotiation.

The USSR has stated that in its opinion the corresponding article in the USA draft is inadequate as it would seem to allow dissemination of nuclear weapons to nations within the NATO alliance. Neither existing NATO arrangementsnor others which have been discussed constitute dissemination of nuclear weapons to nations within the alliance.

It seems obvious that the reconciliation of the two divergent views of what Article I should contain, and what the following article on the specific undertakings of non-nuclear nations should be, will require extended negotiations among all the nations affected. The problem is to draft and agree on a treaty which, while it will prevent the further proliferation of nuclear weapons, and more specifically will prevent the emergence of more independent nuclear powers, will not inhibit the free political evolution of Europe and will preserve the right of all nations to enter into such political arrangements as they may wish, including collective defence arrangements provided always that such arrangements would not constitute nuclear proliferation.

The Canadian delegation finds the USSR draft defective also in the following respects. It contains no provisions for verifying that the parties are fulfilling their obligations. The USA draft treaty contains the provision that the parties will cooperate in facilitating acceptance of IAEA safeguards. The Canadian delegation feels that this is a provision which any nation that has no intention of manufacturing nuclear weapons should be willing to accept.

Article VI of the USSR draft, concerning withdrawal from the obligations of the treaty, is modelled on the corresponding article of the treaty prohibiting nuclear tests in the three environments, signed in Moscow. This

article, the Canadian delegation believes, is too permissive. Any state could renounce its obligations that "if it decides that extraordinary events, related to the subject matter of this Treaty have jeopardized the supreme interests of its country." It could denounce the treaty on what might be unfounded rumours or mere morbid suspicions, and would not have to justify its action in any international forum. The corresponding article in the USA draft (Art. VI, I) obliges the party contemplating withdrawal to bring the matter to the attention of the Security Council--which could be expected to investigate thoroughly a situation which could have grave consequences for international peace and security.

Article VI, 2 in the USA draft treaty is intended to provide non-nuclear nations with the opportunity to review the operation of the treaty after a stated period of years. In addition to giving signatories a chance to review the provisions of the treaty in the light of actual experience, this portion of the USA draft treaty will also give the non-nuclear nations an opportunity to assess whether the nuclear powers have in fact achieved "effective agreements to halt the nuclear arms race, and to reduce armaments, including particularly nuclear arsenals," as the 4th preambular paragraph of the USA draft would have them declare. If there were no such progress, the non-nuclear nations could decide whether they wished to be bound any longer by the essentially one-sided obligations of the treaty.

The memorandum of the non-aligned members of the ENDC from which I quoted at the beginning of my remarks expressed the view that an agreement by non-nuclear nations not to make or acquire nuclear weapons would be inequitable unless steps are soon taken by the nuclear powers to limit and reduce the stocks of nuclear weapons and vehicles, with the purpose of finally eliminating them. This viewpoint was put more forcefully by the representative of the UAR at the 224th meeting of the ENDC when he said a non-dissemination treaty should not be "a mere instrument in which the non-nuclear powers would gladly renounce their rights to acquire nuclear weapons in order just to perpetuate the monopoly or the privileged position of the present five nuclear powers." (ENDC/224, p. II) Canada agrees with these views.

On the other hand, we cannot agree with a more extreme suggestion which we have heard expressed, that is, that the nuclear powers have no right to ask the non-nuclear nations to abstain from developing a nuclear armoury, while they themselves retain nuclear weapons. Because of the increased risk of nuclear war opened up by the further spread of nuclear weapons, and the tremendous destructive

power which might then be unleashed, agreement by the non-nuclear nations in an international treaty not to make or to acquire nuclear weapons would constitute a positive and constructive step of very great importance to the entire international community, including those nations such as my own which have the ability to make nuclear weapons but have chosen not to do so. In the view of the Canadian Government, the acquisition of nuclear weapons by additional countries would not effectively or permanently add to their security and would seriously risk upsetting the balance of power on which world security rests today. The effect of additional military nuclear capability would be to stimulate demands for similar weapons among neighbouring countries who may feel themselves threatened and thus lead to nuclear proliferation within the area. Thus the result of the acquisition of nuclear weapons by additional countries would be to precipitate another round in the arms race at fantastic cost to the countries directly concerned and without any permanent increase in the protection available to the country first taking this step. An increase in the number of nuclear powers would certainly inhibit the possibility of effective agreements among existing nuclear powers to reduce nuclear weaponry. It would tend to make nations consider the use of nuclear weapons in warfare to be normal and thus would increase the possibility of a devastating all-out nuclear war between great powers. I might add that the worst possible reason for embarking on a programme of making nuclear weapons would be that the successful explosion of a nuclear weapon confers a special prestige. This is an example of the sin of pride, against which His Holiness Pope Paul VI warned us, in these words: "It is pride ... which provokes tension and struggles for prestige, or predominance, of colonialism and of selfishness; it is pride that disrupts brotherhood." Taken in the context of joining the nuclear arms race, it would be pride that would lead a nation to push the world in the direction of an all-destructive nuclear war, instead of trying to take the road that can lead towards safety.

The ENDC Report has attached to it also a draft of a declaration on non-dissemination, such as proposed on 29 July, 1965, by Mr. Fanfani, who described its purpose in the following terms: "appeal to the non-nuclear countries to take an initiative which, without prejudice to their own points of view, would fix a certain period for a moratorium on the possible dissemination of nuclear weapons. It is quite conceivable that the non-nuclear countries, particularly those close to nuclear capability, might agree to renounce unilaterally equipping themselves with nuclear weapons for a specific length of time, it being understood of course that if their ... demands were not complied with during the time limit, they would resume their freedom of action."

The delegation of Italy to the ENDC submitted the draft declaration on 14 September 1965, observing at that time: "the draft declaration which we are submitting to the Committee is not an alternative to the non-dissemination treaty which we have proposed (ENDC/152), nor should it hold up any progress that might be possible towards that end. The declaration is intended to gain time and facilitate progress. The declaration we are proposing is a unilateral one--a unilateral manifestation of goodwill; it does not have the character of a contractual commitment."

(More)

The First Committee will doubtless consider the Italian draft declaration, as a possible way to move towards non-dissemination agreements should it prove that the production of an effective treaty is likely to be long delayed.

We have noted with interest recent efforts of African and Latin American countries to contribute to a solution of the problem of nuclear proliferation by examining the feasibility of establishing nuclear-free zones in their respective regions. We welcome these efforts. Canada holds the view that arrangements for nuclear-free zones can be useful in limiting the spread of nuclear weapons provided they take account of the following principles: (a) any proposal for a nuclear-free zone should be acceptable to all the countries of the geographical area in which the zone would be located; (b) it should provide for arrangements for verifying that the commitment undertaken are carried out; and (c) it should be consistent with the generally accepted principle that no disarmament measure should create a unilateral advantage for any state or group of states. It is our sincere hope that we shall, before long, see effective nuclear-free zones established, in areas where these principles apply.

The non-nuclear and non-aligned nations, through their representatives on the ENDC, have called for an agreement on non-proliferation to be accompanied by steps to halt the arms race and reduce nuclear armaments. The Canadian delegation believes that this appeal is just and reasonable, and that some clear connection should be established between agreement by the non-nuclear powers not to acquire nuclear weapons, and action by the nuclear powers to embark on a specific series of measures leading towards disarmament. What steps could the nuclear powers take? It is encouraging to note that the United Kingdom has already taken a first step. As Lord Chalfont recalled in the ENDC, HMG announced two years ago the end of their production of U 235 for military purposes, and that they were beginning to stop production of military plutonium. The United Nations and the ENDC have had before them for a long time the United States' proposal to halt the production of fissionable material for weapons purposes, and to start making a reduction in the stocks held by the two major nuclear powers. There is also the proposal, placed before the ENDC in January 1964, and since renewed, to call a halt to the production of long-range nuclear weapon vehicles--rockets and aircraft--and the development of new types. This could lead the way to balanced reductions of these fear-inspiring types of armaments. The Soviet Union has called for the destruction of bombing aircraft in its

programme of collateral measures presented to the General Assembly on 7 December, 1964. Unfortunately, there have been no serious discussions or negotiations on these proposals. The Canadian delegation believes that agreement on these three measures--or in fact on any one of them--could go far to halt the arms race, reduce tension, and create favourable conditions for further steps towards the goal of general and complete disarmament. The Canadian delegation believes that this impasse could be overcome by great power agreement to effect some--preferably all--of the collateral measures we have mentioned.

There is another measure which if it would be agreed to by the nuclear powers would provide an offset to the obligations not to acquire nuclear weapons which the non-nuclear nations are asked to assume. This measure is to prohibit underground nuclear weapon testing, thus completing the process of total abolition of nuclear testing. This would signify an end to the further elaboration of nuclear weapons--whose destructiveness would seem already to have reached the limits of the human imagination.

I should like to quote what Mr. Nilsson, the Foreign Minister of Sweden said on this point in the General Assembly, on the 6th of October last (A/PV 1350, page 52). "Sweden also holds that it is a fair and urgent demand that measures designed to freeze present nuclear capabilities be coupled with measures designed to hinder additional countries from procuring some of that same military strength. The comprehensive test ban would in fact have that double-sided effect, and that is the reason why we want to give it first priority." Mr. Nilsson went on to mention the Swedish proposal for the establishing of a world-wide surveillance system, to ensure that a prohibition on all forms of nuclear testing was being observed. It would mean establishing a network of technologically advanced seismological stations. Canada believes that this proposal may help the nuclear powers move towards closing of the gap which still prevents their agreement on a ban on underground testing. Our country is most willing to participate in discussions on the formation of the Swedish-inspired "detection club".

Having reviewed briefly, and perhaps with certain gaps in the picture, the present status of disarmament negotiations which have been in progress in the ENDC and the United Nations during the last four years, we should now like to say a few words about the proposal for a World Disarmament conference, one of the items on the agenda of this committee to which many of the members attach a very high importance. The Canadian delegation,

as I said during the discussion on the order of business, favours the holding of a world disarmament conference, under certain conditions.

It is self-evident that for disarmament to be general and complete, which is the goal this Assembly has agreed upon in Resolution 1378 XIV (1959) and reaffirmed several times since, all nuclear powers and potential nuclear powers must take part at an appropriate stage in the negotiations. I recall the words of the Hon. Mr. Martin, Secretary of State for External Affairs, in the General Assembly on 24 September, when he said, "Canada hopes that the People's Republic of China will be invited to take part in the discussions." The world disarmament conference may serve to bring this about. But it is also evident that there are many difficult problems in convening such a conference. We ought to think these problems through, in discussion in this committee, and in private consultations between interested delegations, before the UNGA takes the final action for this year by resolution. The problems include (a) under whose auspices will the conference be held; (b) who will issue the invitations; (c) how will it be financed; (d) what is the agenda to be; (e) can there be prior agreement on the principles to serve as a basis of discussion; (f) can procedural rules be agreed to; (g) when and where will the conference be held. Unless this committee can establish a substantial measure of agreement on these points the prospects for holding a successful conference would appear to be very uncertain.

To sum up, what we have to do, in considering this proposal for a world disarmament conference, is to think through clearly what we hope it will accomplish--not setting our sights too high--and make it clear what we think its agenda should be. It would be in the highest degree irresponsible if we should allow ourselves to be deluded by the idea that, as the United Nations and the ENDC has failed to make any progress since the Moscow treaty and other partial measures of 1963, there is nothing to do now but pass a resolution calling for a world disarmament conference, and think nothing more need be done about disarmament until this conference is held.

A final point. Even if we establish a respectable consensus on how the problems just mentioned are to be solved, or approached, we should make it clear that the disarmament dialogue should continue, pending the holding of the hoped-for world conference. I have mentioned some of the measures intended to slow down, if not halt, the

arms race, and reduce international tension. These measures are before this committee, and the ENDC, a negotiating body, which, even though it does not include some important nations, is representative of the membership of the UN. Given certain changes in the policies of the great powers in regard to the measures I have mentioned--changes which are by no means impossible--agreement could be reached on these measures. It would be highly encouraging for a world conference if it could open with some further "collateral" agreements having been attained. Therefore, the Canadian delegation holds the view very strongly indeed, that whatever the decision on a world conference, the disarmament negotiations in this forum, and in the ENDC must continue, at the least until the world conference is held.

We have touched on a rather wide range of subjects, as we consider it necessary to do, in opening the discussion on disarmament in this committee. We reserve the right to speak again, as appropriate, when the committee comes to consider more closely the several disarmament items on our agenda.