CANADIAN MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

CAUTION: ADVANCE TEXT

PRESS RELEASE No. 92

November 28, 1967

FOR RELEASE ON DELIVERY

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PROHIBITION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Text of Statement to be made by the Canadian Representative, Mr. Hugh Faulkner, M.P., on the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use of Nuclear Weapons (Item 96) in the First Committee, on November 28,1967.

The Memorandum submitted by the USSR in document A/6834 states that, because of the accumulation of large stocks of nuclear weapons in the world and the complicated international situation, the conclusion of a convention on the prohibition of the use of nuclear weapons is an "important and urgent" matter.

The Canadian delegation has long been convinced that arms control and disarmament is one of the major tasks confronting the United Nations. The possible further spread of nuclear weapons alarms Canadians, which is why the Canadian delegation is willing to support measures which offer effective means for nuclear weapons control. As has been frequently pointed out it is the sense of insecurity on the part of nations that gives rise to the arms race. Yet is is the arms race in turn which further heightens the sense of insecurity among nations. This leads to the dangerous spiraling of an ever-greater commitment to newer and more sophisticated weapons as part of a programme of self-defence. This costly and dangerous trend will not be stopped--not even significantly curtailed--by a declaration prohibiting the use of nuclear weapons. Security of a lasting character must be sought, first, through precise measures to control and limit nuclear weapons as well as other types of armaments, and, second, through agreed measures of disarmament leading to the reduction and elimination of nuclear weapons as part of a phased, controlled programme of general disarmament.

As was pointed out by the Canadian representative in the debate on a similar item in this Committee six years ago, the Canadian delegation has every sympathy with the views of those delegations who have over the years supported

resolutions whose aim was to put an end to the possibility of nuclear weapons of mass destruction being used in time of war. We agree with their sentiments and respect their concern that the peoples of the world should not be subject to the death and destruction which the use of such weapons would cause. This is an aim which all Canadians profoundly share. While agreeing that the question is important, we have differed from supporters of these resolutions, not on the goal to be attained, but rather on the best and most effective means to be used in achieving that goal.

The USSR states that the adoption of a clear decision by the General Assembly in favour of a convention prohibiting the use of nuclear weapons will serve peace and relax international tension. For our part, we seriously question the value of such a convention. The Canadian delegation certainly favours the cause of peace and the relaxation of international tension and nuclear arms control. We do not believe, however, that a declaratory prohibition against the use of nuclear weapons is the most effective way of securing world peace. Such an agreement, if accepted, would leave untouched the present large stocks of nuclear weapons maintained by the military nuclear powers and would not represent a step towards the reduction or elimination of nuclear weapons or towards disarmament. On various occasions in the past Soviet representatives have rejected Western proposals on the grounds that they did not constitute progress towards disarmament. But history shows that a declaratory measure such as the Kellogg-Briand Pact was conspicuously unsuccessful in preventing war. In the long term, peace and security are more surely secured through agreements on nuclear arms control such as the partial test ban treaty and the outer space treaty which can be effectively verified by the parties to them. An essential feature of all such measures is the willing support of the two most powerful nuclear countries in the world today--the USA and the USSR.

Over the years the Canadian Government has sought to strengthen peace and to diminish international tension by specific and practical measures rather than through declarations. For instance, we believe that increasing reliance should be placed on international forces coupled with disarmament, rather than upon national armed forces which tend to place increasing economic burdens on those who have to contribute to them as well as to increase international tensions. It is for this reason that Canada has stressed the importance of United Nations activities in the field of peacekeeping as witnessed in Canadian contributions in the Congo, the Middle East and Cyprus. It is also for this reason that Canada, through active participation in disarmament negotiations, has been helping to find a way out of the vicious circle of the arms race.

Throughout such negotiations we have consistently maintained that the best and, indeed, the only practicable way of ensuring that nuclear and thermonuclear weapons will never be used lies through comprehensive but gradual and phased disarmament, subject at each step to effective international supervision and verification. Under a broad programme for general disarmament, nuclear and thermonuclear weapons could be controlled and reduced in conjunction with other forms of armaments in a way which would not result in military advantage to one state or group of states. There must of course be parallel steps in reducing international tension and resolving international disputes, with a corresponding development of international institutions to maintain peace and security. In the view of the Canadian delegation, a declaratory measure such as the one proposed by the Soviet Union would serve to enhance merely the illusion rather than the substance of genuine peace and security throughout the world. In this forum we must deal in terms of meaningful, realistic and workable proposals to reduce and eliminate the danger of nuclear war. In the treaty for the prohibition of nuclear weapons in Latin America we have already considered such a proposal, while the negotiations on a non-proliferation treaty in Geneva also hold out hope for positive progress.