

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
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THE WORLD'S MOST FATEFUL PROBLEM

Statement by General E.L.M. Burns, Canadian Delegate, First Committee of the United Nations, October 11, 1962.

Mr. Chairman,

In the opinion of the Canadian Delegation, there is nothing before this Assembly which is more urgent or fateful than the question of how to put a final stop to the testing of nuclear weapons. This is an object for whose achievement all members of the organization should stand united, for all of us will suffer if these experiments continue. The United Nations General Assembly cannot legislate an end to nuclear tests, but it can and should use the immense moral force of its decisions to press for a speedy solution of the problem.

Mr. Chairman, my Government remains unequivocally opposed to all nuclear-weapons tests. That virtually all delegations also oppose them has been made clear by the statements which we have listened to in the general debate in plenary. This can be taken as proof that nuclear testing is opposed by the vast majority of men and women all over the world.

The Canadian Objections

Canada is opposed to further testing for two good reasons. In his statement in the general debate, the Secretary of State for External Affairs emphasized that, first of all, we are gravely concerned by the dangers to human health which result from nuclear testing. In our view, which we believe is supported by scientific findings, the bodily health of everyone is endangered by exposure to additional radiation. But, what is more disquieting, increased radioactivity resulting from nuclear tests can have incalculable effects on future generations. This generation would, therefore, perpetrate a grave moral wrong on posterity by continuing nuclear testing.

It may be said that, from the humane and moral standpoint, these arguments are sound, but that, if considerations of defence and national security require them, nuclear-weapons tests must go on, notwithstanding their undesirable effects. But does

continued testing improve the security of any nation? In the short term, it may be claimed that nuclear testing is required in order to effect or restore a balance in weapon power. But is there any reason to think that national security can be maintained over the years in this way? In my view, there is not. A protracted competition in this sphere -- between super-powers already armed to a degree hardly imaginable -- can only increase international tensions, and the ultimate danger of nuclear war. The major nuclear powers are themselves in agreement that continued testing increases the pace of the armaments race. In a joint statement released last August 27 by the Prime Minister of Great Britain and the President of the U.S.A., we read the following sentences: "The U.S.A. and the U.K. cannot emphasize too strongly the urgency we attach to the problem of ending all nuclear testing once and for all. For the safety and security of all of us this deadly competition must be halted and we again urge the Soviet Government to join with us in meaningful action to make this necessity a reality".

The Soviet Position

The Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the U.S.S.R. has been equally firm in spelling out the grave consequences of continued testing. In a letter addressed by him to Prime Minister Macmillan in April of this year, he wrote as follows: "Throughout the world the peoples are justly expressing their indignation not only because nuclear tests lead to the fouling of the atmosphere and may in some degree have a harmful effect on peoples' health and their moral and physical condition, but also -- and this is the most important point -- because the race to build up nuclear weapons will be accelerated even more by the new series of experimental nuclear explosions".

Clearly, then, dangers of further experimentation in this field are admitted. It may have grave effects both on our own health and on future generations; it is ultimately a threat to the security of mankind; it increases international tensions and reduces the possibility of agreements in other fields. If this is the belief of the leading statesmen of the nuclear powers, why can they not stop the tests? But it is not only the responsibility of the nuclear powers; nuclear testing affects all nations; to deal with it is the responsibility of all of us represented here. Can we not, as rational beings, act in our own interest?

Advantages of a Ban

The advantages of a test-cessation agreement are many. Such an agreement would not give a special advantage to this or that country or alliance, but would be in the interest of all humanity. Let me summarize the truly impressive gains which a nuclear-test ban agreement would achieve.

First, as the major powers themselves recognize, it would significantly reduce radiation hazards and improve international security.

Second, it would inhibit the development of more and more destructive nuclear weapons.

Third, it would arrest the development of nuclear weapons by an increasing number of nations, a danger whose gravity can be recognized by all and, one may say, especially by the present nuclear powers.

Fourth, it would be a start on disarmament. My Delegation entirely endorses the view expressed by the Acting Secretary-General in the introduction to his annual report, in which he emphasized that the first step toward disarmament is to stop nuclear testing. We share his sincere hope "that the nuclear powers will realize that the whole world is hoping and praying that an agreed first step may be taken soon".

In short, an agreement to end nuclear-weapons tests would be a first clear proof that the many declarations by the great powers that they want to end the arms race are not mere words, but will result in real and effective action.

Devising Means

I have reviewed so far the weighty reasons in favour of putting a stop to nuclear tests. In my opinion these factors, taken together, should convince every rational man that the need for a solution is urgent. It remains, however, to devise practical means for achieving this goal. In recent months several suggestions have been made which, my Delegation believes, should be endorsed by this Assembly.

In the first place, we strongly support the proposal put forward in the 18-Nation Committee for an early out-off date by which all testing would be ended - January 1, 1963, or, we would hope, earlier. The acceptance by this Assembly of a target date should provide added incentive to speedily resolve the remaining differences.

Second, Canada endorses the proposal for an immediate ban on all testing in the atmosphere, outer space, and under water. Such a proposal is common to the draft treaties advanced by both sides, and an agreement would be a substantial step in the direction of a comprehensive ban. It would greatly reduce or even remove the health hazard resulting from nuclear testing. Moreover, differences over inspection do not constitute a barrier to agreement in this field.

Third, my Delegation wishes to underline the importance we attach to the contribution of the eight unaligned nations represented at the Geneva negotiations in putting forward compromise proposals on a verification system. The Canadian Delegation has taken the stand at the 18-Nation Conference -- and we reaffirm it now -- that the eight-nation proposals provide a sound basis for an agreement satisfactory to all concerned. A system based on existing national networks of observation posts with new posts if necessary, an international scientific commission

to process and examine data from these nations, and the obligation of states parties to the agreement to furnish the facts necessary to establish the nature of any suspicious event on their territory -- these are the main elements of the eight-nation proposal which we believe should be incorporated, without further delay, in a draft treaty for ending all nuclear tests.

A Fundamental Principle Involved

Agreement on these points would narrow the differences separating the two sides to one major question: What is to be done if there is a dispute as to the nature of an event which has taken place in the territory of one of the parties to the agreement? It appears from new scientific data submitted last August at Geneva by the U.S.A. and Great Britain that the area of uncertainty where doubtful events could arise has been considerably reduced. Nevertheless, controversy persists over the question of how to verify that no underground testing takes place. Technical problems which have been raised in the examination of this subject could not usefully be discussed in this Committee. However, there is a fundamental matter of principle which my Delegation is firmly convinced must be borne in mind by the nuclear powers in their negotiations in this field.

It is agreed, I think, that no foreseeable inspection system will fully meet the preoccupations of all parties to a test-ban agreement. What is needed then is a reasonable assurance that their interests will be protected. But this criterion cannot be applied exclusively to the risks which may be inherent in the treaty itself; it is equally important not to lose sight of the grave risks which humanity continues to run in the absence of such an agreement.

It has been alleged, for example, that a verification system involving "on-site" inspection could mean that espionage data would be collected by the inspectors. In my opinion, the possibility that the international inspectorate could be used in this way is exceedingly remote. I cannot believe that the Soviet Union would seriously contend that this risk compares in any way with the dangers which they themselves agree are inherent in continued testing.

Balancing Two Risks

It is also argued that the risk of a state evading its obligations under a nuclear-tests agreement must be reduced to a minimum. My Delegation fully recognizes the importance of this requirement, since a treaty which would not give assurances that states were living up to their commitments would be cause for continuing concern and tension rather than diminishing these factors as an effective agreement is intended to do. But the risk of evasion should also be balanced against the dangers mankind must live with in the absence of an agreement. If it is feared

that states might sign an agreement and later conduct secret tests, the nuclear powers must not only ask themselves whether this risk is acceptable in principle. They must also assess with equal care whether the military significance of such evasions would be greater or less than the dangers to health and security resulting from continued testing and an accelerated arms race.

This balance of risks and advantages has to be kept in mind in order that the negotiating parties may assess the real significance of possible espionage or evasions. As long as the negotiators concentrate their attention on the disadvantages to their security which might result from a particular system of inspection, it is doubtful whether any real progress is possible. But when these disadvantages are seen in their proper perspective, against the graver prospects of continued testing, the necessary conditions will exist to bring an effective test ban to reality. If the negotiating parties can readjust their thinking in this way, new compromises, acceptable to both sides, could be achieved without delay.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, let me review briefly the main considerations which will guide my Delegation in dealing with the questions to be decided under the present item: First, we wish to see a halt -- by January 1, 1963 or earlier -- to all nuclear-weapons tests; second, as a means of achieving this end, we support the proposal for an immediate test ban in the atmosphere, outer space and under water; third, we desire an effective international agreement which will provide assurances that no further tests are carried out and that all states live up to their obligations under the treaty. We are convinced that these objectives demand urgent attention, and we sincerely hope that this Committee will act quickly and forcefully to assist in their realization. I can assure you, Mr. Chairman, that the Canadian Delegation will give its full support and active co-operation in the endeavour.

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