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STATEMENT OF THE CANADIAN REPRESENTATIVE ON THE DISARMAMENT COMMISSION

Statement made in the United Nations Disarmament Commission on July 21, 1954, by Mr. David M. Johnson, Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations and Canadian Representative on the Disarmament Commission

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With the reconvening of the Disarmament Commission, the members of the Sub-Committee have an opportunity and a duty to report on the manner in which they have sought to discharge the Commission's mandate to "seek in private an acceptable solution" to the disarmament problem. The Commission's forthcoming meetings will also enable the other members of the Commission who were not represented during the London talks to evaluate the work of the Sub-Committee. Although it may be premature to crystallize the collective judgment of the Commission since we all hope that the Soviet rejection of the new proposals submitted by the Western Powers in London is not final, we cannot avoid forming our own conclusions as to why it has not so far been possible to reach agreement.

There is perhaps a danger that the inherent complexity and difficulty of the disarmament problem and the successive failures over many years to reach agreement should lead us into such pessimism that our proceedings might become either formalistic or propagandist. However, as I shall try to show, I think we can draw some encouragement and a truer perspective from the realization that there has been a gradual narrowing of the gap over the years between the positions of the principal Powers concerned. We have, moreover, at the present series of meetings an opportunity for breaking new ground, for discussing new proposals and not merely for reworking old controversies.

In my opinion -- which I think can be documented -- the new Anglo-French proposals represent a major advance in the Western position. The immediate and outright rejection of this serious effort towards conciliation and agreement should not blind us to the importance of these proposals nor of the London talks through which they were brought to birth. If the Sub-Committee had been able to report nothing more than the tabling of the Anglo-French proposals and of the United States working paper on the rights, functions and powers of an international control organ, these meetings would have been well worthwhile.

This view is, I know, at variance with the popular tendency to discount the value of the Anglo-French and the United States papers because they have been rejected by one delegation whose agreement is, of course, essential to their implementation. It is true, and always will be, that by the very nature of the subject the Great Powers have a kind of veto in disarmament negotiations; for if they are not all agreed there can be no disarmament. However, I think we make a mistake to label as a "failure" talks which produced the first outline, which either side has submitted since negotiations began, of a comprehensive workable disarmament plan. Perhaps the Canadian delegation is in a position to express such an opinion more forcibly than either the United States, United Kingdom or French delegations because the Canadian delegation on the Sub-Committee did not submit proposals of its own.

The new proposals advanced by the Western Powers at the London talks sought to come to grips with two problems the Canadian Government has long regarded as central. First, we have maintained that an effective disarmament programme must be comprehensive, that it must embrace both nuclear and conventional weapons in a single agreement, providing for effective control and supervision of the various reductions and prohibitions agreed upon. Such a comprehensive programme would go forward almost automatically as confidence increases and the control organ reports that it is ready for the next stage, until the total prohibition and abolition of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction has been accomplished. Second, we have insisted that we in the West could not consider depriving ourselves of our most powerful weapon before we know in detail what kind of inspection and control system the Soviet Union would be prepared to accept and indeed before they have accepted it and put it into operation. Without an adequate system of international inspection and control, which would give each participating State adequate assurances that disarmament pledges would be honoured, no disarmament system can be effective. On both these points -- the need for a comprehensive and phased programme and on the requirements with regard to inspection -- the Western Powers have put forward new proposals.

The United States working paper, submitted by Mr. Patterson at the London talks, was a notable contribution to the detailed study of the control problem. The Canadian Government supports this paper. It is because we feel that it did not receive the serious attention of our Soviet colleagues which its importance merited that I propose to refer at some length to this problem.

First, however, I should like to comment on the French and United Kingdom proposals on phasing which give us for the first time a detailed timetable comprising the following elements of a comprehensive disarmament programme: first, the total prohibition of the use and manufacture of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction of every type, together with the conversion of existing stocks of nuclear materials to peaceful purposes; second, major reductions in all armed forces and conventional armaments; third, the establishment of a control organ with rights, powers and functions adequate to guarantee the effective observance of the agreed prohibitions and reductions.

These proposals represent an earnest and commendable effort to bridge the gap between the Western and Soviet positions and to bring about at long last an agreement at least on basic principles, and so pave the way for further progress towards effective disarmament. Canada supported and heartily approved the initiative of the United Kingdom and France in making these proposals.

The chief complaint of the Soviet Union against the United Nations control plan -- the majority plan -- has been that it postponed until the final stage the prohibition and elimination of atomic weapons. The Soviets have argued that the Western Powers were attempting to bring about international control including inspection within Soviet territory at the very beginning, and postpone everything to do with atomic weapons until the last stage which they said might never be reached. The new proposals dispose of the Soviet contention by providing for an immediate prohibition of the use of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction except in defence against aggression. At the beginning of the programme there would be a freeze on military manpower and expenditures including atomic. The prohibition of the manufacture of nuclear weapons would follow at an intermediate stage. The process would be completed by the destruction of stockpiles of nuclear weapons and their conversion to peaceful uses. Moreover, the international control organ, which is central to our conception, would come into being progressively and would grow up with its task. There would be no question of international inspectors exercising all the rights granted to them under the international agreement until the final stage in the disarmament programme is reached. The new proposals also dispose of the Soviet argument that the Western Powers are only interested in securing information on the armed forces of the Soviet Union. The atomic side is covered from the outset and no step is proposed which would not apply to all countries alike.

Soviet representatives have also objected to the Western concept of stages, maintaining that the last stage could be indefinitely postponed. The Anglo-French proposals go some distance towards meeting this criticism. Not only are the stages reduced in number from five to three, but as I have said earlier, the progression from one stage to another now depends only on the decision of the international control organ that it is ready to carry out the controls necessary for the succeeding stage. Nothing more is required. Nothing less would be prudent. Assuming the co-operation of all member governments, the whole system of disarmament would now go forward from stage to stage automatically. Given the same degree of co-operation by States, we could confidently say that the new proposals would take less time to implement than the old.

Although there are other points which could be made, I shall mention only one way in which the new conception seeks to meet Soviet criticism of the majority plan. Under the latter, the functions and powers of the international control organ called for the "ownership in trust" of all atomic enterprises. The new proposals, as Mr. Lloyd suggested in London, envisage the possibility of inspectors supervising the disarmament convention with powers which would enable them, as Mr. Lloyd said, to "be in on" all the decisions of the national management of atomic enterprises, and all the information available to the management

would be available at all times to the inspectors of the international control authority supervising the disarmament programme, in accordance with the terms of the agreement. In the manifold operations of a disarmament supervisory system, there would be some for which a very loose type of inspection would be adequate, whereas for others it would probably be necessary for the officials of the international control organ to have powers comparable to those of management, even though they might not be given formal managerial status.

It was indeed disappointing that even in private and informal talks the Soviet representative not only rejected the new Anglo-French proposals out of hand, but throughout our talks could only with great difficulty be brought to discuss the problem of international safeguards and controls which most of the Western countries regard as a prerequisite of any disarmament. The Soviet representative focused his attention instead almost entirely on a proposal for unconditional prohibition of the use of atomic weapons. Only if we were prepared to agree to an immediate unconditional prohibition of use was the Soviet Government apparently prepared to negotiate seriously with us on the disarmament problem as such.

For reasons which will be abundantly clear, the free world cannot accept in the present state of mistrust and hostility an unconditional prohibition on the use of nuclear weapons. By such action we would in effect renounce our right to protect ourselves against aggression, a right which is explicitly recognized in the Charter of the United Nations. That such a proposal should be pressed as a pre-condition to serious negotiation on disarmament is disturbing evidence that the Soviet Government at the present time does not share our determination to reach a settlement. If the Western countries were to accept such a position, they would not only be giving up the right of individual or collective self-defence recognized in the Charter, but they might find at the same time they had accepted an indefinite postponement of the negotiation of the kind of comprehensive disarmament agreement covering prohibition, reduction, and control of all weapons, including nuclear weapons, which is the essence of a workable disarmament programme. It remains our hope, despite Soviet insistence on an unconditional ban on the use of atomic weapons, that they will at some future date accept the proposals set forth in the United Kingdom-French memorandum that all Members of the United Nations should explicitly re-affirm that they regard themselves as prohibited in accordance with the United Nations Charter from the use of nuclear weapons except in defence against aggression. So long as the Soviet Union refuses to acknowledge this Charter obligation, and so long as they continue to insist on an unconditional ban, we can only consider that they find it useful to them as propaganda, and perhaps also as an excuse for not entering into a discussion with us on the heart of the control problem.

As Mr. Norman Robertson, our representative in London, said in the Sub-Committee:

> "The reason other countries are so interested in this subject of control is that when they sign a disarmament convention they want to know that all parties will carry out what they undertake to do. They want to know that it will not be possible -- or at all events it will be exceedingly unlikely

and difficult -- for any state to avoid disclosing all its arms and means of waging war. The Soviet proposals describe how an international control organ, provided it did not interfere in the domestic affairs of states (an almost impossible condition), would be empowered to remain permanently at certain key points which it would specify (such as atomic enterprises) in order to verify the observance by Governments of their obligations under the disarmament convention. However, how is an international control organ to know that everything has been disclosed? How is an international control organ to keep itself up to date and to discover violations of the agreement in parts of the country to which it has not been given access because the Government concerned says there is nothing there affected by the disarmament agreement? Surely this is asking us to trust the unsupported declaration of a Government in much the same way as we are asked to accept an uncontrollable prohibition of use.

"The Soviet representative tells us, as his predecessors have since 1947, that the control organ would have the right to make special investigations in cases in which it had specific grounds for suspecting a violation. I take it that the inspectors could then apply to the Government to visit town 'X', where there was alleged to be an undisclosed armaments factory. In due time under the Soviet scheme the Government would permit the officials of the international control organ to visit town 'X', accompanied and shepherded by Government officials of the state concerned -- and they would see what the Government wanted them to see.

"Without labouring the point further, I simply do not see how, under the Soviet system of control as so far revealed to us, we could be sure of having at least forewarning of any violations or evasions of any consequence. To my mind the warning is of the essence of any effective system of safeguards. It is perhaps even more important than the machinery for dealing with violations, although in this respect I also regard the Soviet proposals as completely inadequate since they would not give effective powers to the international control organ, nor would they provide for a veto-free decision on the international control organ's report in the Security Council.

"In brief," Mr. Robertson concluded, "it seems to me important that officials of the international control organ be empowered to pursue their investigations anywhere at any time within the boundaries of every state covered by the agreement, with no 'by your leave' and with complete freedom of movement, including freedom of movement by air."

The Soviet position on inspection has not changed. The Soviets have yet to clarify their formula that they are ready to accept inspection "on a continuing basis without the right to interfere in the domestic affairs of States". As every one of us is aware, there is as yet no international agreement on the interpretation to be placed on reservations concerning domestic affairs. I think it is altogether legitimate for the free world to know exactly what is the significance of this reservation so far as it is related to the carrying out of a disarmament programme.

I think any objective observer would agree that the Western Powers have adopted a co-operative attitude in reviewing the disarmament problem in the Sub-Committee. This, unfortunately, is more than can be said for the Soviet attitude during the London discussions. Listening to Mr. Malik in London in 1954 made us feel we were still back at Lake Success in 1946. The Soviet Union delegation repeated once more the age-old proposal for an arbitrary one-third reduction of the armed forces of the great Powers without first ascertaining the respective strengths of the Powers at the present time. They have also asked once again for the dismantling of military bases established by the Western Powers under NATO, but have said nothing about Soviet bases or other forms of military assistance.

The end of the London talks should not be regarded as a final breakdown of negotiations on the problem of disarmament. As I indicated earlier, the Sub-Committee was called upon to submit a report to the Disarmament Commission by mid-July. The members of the Sub-Committee considered that the time had come to inform the Commission of its work without prejudice to the final outcome of efforts to reach a settlement. There is no doubt that the differences between the positions of the East and the West in this matter have been narrowed during the lengthy discussions which have taken place in recent years, and it is fair to suggest that these positions may have been further narrowed during the London talks.

One thing is certain: The responsibility for any progress made lies entirely with the West. The Western Governments have made an earnest attempt to meet the criticism of their position by the Soviet Union. Had there been any evidence from the Soviet Union delegation of a wish to negotiate seriously on this subject, I feel confident that greater progress might have been made.

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