

CANADIAN DELEGATION TO THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
(FIFTEENTH SESSION)

RELEASE ON DELIVERY

PRESS RELEASE NO. 26
December 1, 1960



Press Office,
750 Third Avenue,
YU 6-5740

Statement on the Suspension of Nuclear and Thermo-Nuclear Tests
by Mr. W. B. Nesbitt, Chairman of the Delegation,
in the First Committee on December 1, 1960

Mr. Chairman:

Until very recently our discussions in this Committee have focussed somewhat more on the question of general and complete disarmament than on the related matters within the first item on our agenda. For that reason previous Canadian interventions have not dealt specifically with the very important problem of nuclear and thermo-nuclear tests. Even so, on October 19 the Secretary of State for External Affairs of Canada did express satisfaction that the three-Power conference was continuing in Geneva and had progressed far in its work of drafting a treaty on the permanent cessation of tests. As Mr. Green said: "The Canadian Government has taken a clear position against nuclear testing. For this reason we are gratified that the three nuclear Powers have unilaterally discontinued their tests during the negotiations. We hope that this discontinuance will be enshrined in the treaty now being negotiated and that many other Powers will accede to it once it has been concluded." I should like at this juncture, and with that statement of Canadian policy in mind, to offer a few observations in regard to the resolutions which have been tabled in documents A/C.1/L.256 and 258.

Strictly speaking, of course, a cessation of nuclear and thermo-nuclear tests is not in itself a disarmament measure. Nevertheless, a definitive end to such tests would be an immeasurable boon to mankind and of great value in the improvement of international relations in regard to disarmament. A nuclear test treaty, provided it were in fact observed by all nations, would rid the world of the greatest danger which, short of nuclear war, it faces in regard to the largely unknown hazards of radiation. As you all know, the nature and scope of those hazards have been under active study for some time in the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation. The Committee's report will be considered in the Special Political Committee at this Session. Last year, largely as a result of the efforts of the Canadian and like-minded delegations, important new steps were

initiated to improve and complement the activities of the Scientific Committee. I am confident that we can look forward to an increasing understanding of what exactly the radiation hazard means to humanity. Meanwhile there is no question that man-made radiation has been distributed throughout the world as a result of fall-out from nuclear weapons tests. If we can put a definitive end to these tests, we shall certainly relieve peoples everywhere of an oppressive fear and of a very real danger.

It is also true that an observed nuclear test treaty will constitute an impediment to the arms race for the quite simple reason that, without the indispensable step of operational testing, weapons technology cannot be significantly advanced. Thus a controlled international agreement would introduce an element of stability into the overall armaments picture. It would make it difficult for additional nations to acquire a nuclear capability. It would also help to develop mutual confidence between those happily few great states which now possess nuclear arms. Such an agreement would be of immense value in providing a working model of a verification system, with possible applications in the disarmament field. Accordingly, it is to be expected that a nuclear test treaty would have an important and beneficial psychological impact on the international climate generally and on East-West disarmament negotiations in particular.

It will be readily seen that while the suspension of tests is not a disarmament measure, it does in fact have a direct bearing on the vital question of national security. This is so because any treaty which might leave open the possibility that one side could with impunity conduct clandestine tests - thus perfecting its nuclear capability - would run the grave risk of encouraging the offending state to take a chance on aggression once it felt that a sufficient advantage had been gained from its hidden activities. Even if no state were in fact taking such advantage of its opportunity to cheat on an agreement, the situation would continue to be one of mutual suspicion. International tension, far from being eased, would remain acute.

It is obvious that agreement on effective inspection and verification is fundamental to the conclusion of an international agreement to end tests. A very great responsibility, therefore, rests on the three

Faint, illegible text, possibly bleed-through from the reverse side of the page. The text is too light to transcribe accurately.

negotiating countries to reach a mutually satisfactory solution of the control aspects of the treaty they are now drafting.

What the negotiators must face squarely, not only in their own interests but in the interests of the United Nations as a whole, is the necessity of evolving an inspection system that will accord to each side equal certainty that a nuclear test treaty will be observed. This is not a question of one or the other giving away something for nothing. The plain fact is that until a mutually acceptable method of control is devised, the parties will continue to find it difficult to reach agreement on a treaty. So long as there is no international agreement the world remains under the very worrying threat that tests may be resumed, with all the fateful consequences that their resumption would entail. It is as much to the advantage of the nuclear Powers as it is to the rest of the world that this possibility should not become a reality. Accordingly, we feel justified in expressing the strong hope that the negotiating countries will come soon to accept that it is very much in their mutual interests to devise adequate guarantees for the observance of the obligations incorporated in the nuclear test treaty.

For something like two years the United Kingdom, the United States and the USSR have voluntarily refrained from engaging in tests. We are all very grateful for this. But how much more comfortable it would be for all nations if they could be certain beyond any doubt that tests would never be resumed. In the past year France has entered the field of testing and, in the absence of agreement, seems disposed to go on with its programme of nuclear arms development. Other states may be tempted to follow suit. Therefore, although the current moratorium among the Big Three is, of course, most welcome, it is an insufficient warranty either for them or for the world that there will be no more tests. As I have already stressed, that certainty will come only when the negotiating countries reach agreement on a treaty embodying such guarantees as to remove any doubt that it is being loyally implemented.

World opinion at large is abundantly clear. Peoples everywhere are opposed to the further testing of nuclear weapons by any state. This has been, and continues to be, the unequivocal position of the Canadian Government. The Secretary of State for External Affairs has frequently in the

Faint, illegible text covering the page, possibly bleed-through from the reverse side. The text is too light to transcribe accurately.

past year, both in the Canadian Parliament and elsewhere, publicly stated Canadian opposition to further tests. Moreover, the Canadian Delegation at the fourteenth session last year unreservedly supported Sections A and B of resolution 1402 and Resolution 1379.

Again this year the Canadian Government is glad of the opportunity to support two resolutions addressed squarely to the problem of nuclear tests. The first, in Document A/C.1/L.256, stands in the names of three non-nuclear powers - Austria, India and Sweden; the second, in Document 258, has been co-sponsored by some twenty-six non-nuclear powers. Both these initiatives are a tangible demonstration of how the non-nuclear countries can exert their influence in a field of vital concern both to them and to the large nuclear powers which have the responsibility for practical negotiations. It will be no secret to this Committee that my Delegation is always happy to see the smaller and middle Powers playing a role which we have consistently felt they should play with respect to disarmament and related problems.

We have noted that both resolutions make plain, although it is perhaps underscored more explicitly in the 26-Power text, that the overwhelming verdict of world opinion is that tests should not be undertaken by any country. Moreover, both texts go straight to the heart of the problem in recognizing the importance and urgency of an agreement among the nuclear Powers to put a definitive end to future tests under international control. With this in mind, both drafts urge the countries concerned to get on with their vital negotiations.

All of us will have found great interest in the explanations we have heard from the USA and the USSR about the course of the negotiations in Geneva. We now have a much clearer and very helpful understanding of the crucial issues at stake. We cannot but be greatly encouraged by the degree of progress that has been achieved in the many months of patient negotiations. We can take heart from this not only in respect of the nuclear tests problem as such, but also in respect of the broader, but no less important, problem of general and complete disarmament which we all recognize cannot be solved without much devoted attention to serious negotiations. It is true that the few remaining differences in the Geneva test talks constitute formidable obstacles to complete agreement. Those differences relate to such basic issues that failure to agree on them may well bring tumbling to the ground

Faint, illegible text, possibly bleed-through from the reverse side of the page. The text is too light to transcribe accurately.

what has to date been so carefully constructed. We, the non-nuclear Powers, must do what we can to prevent that from happening. That is why my Delegation vigorously endorses the two resolutions to which I have referred. They re-affirm the insistence of the United Nations that remaining difficulties must be overcome by the negotiating countries. They place on record the demand of the United Nations that it be given an early and irrevocable certainty that the testing of nuclear and thermo-nuclear weapons is a thing of the past. On both counts, they carry the full support of my Delegation.

Faint, illegible text at the top of the page, possibly bleed-through from the reverse side. The text is too light to transcribe accurately.

Vertical text on the right edge of the page, likely bleed-through from the reverse side. The text is oriented vertically and is mostly illegible due to fading and the angle of the page.