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CANADA ASSUMES THE CHAIRMANSHIP OF THE CHEMICAL WEAPONS WORKING GROUP OF THE COMMITTEE ON DISARMAMENT

The Honourable Allan J. MacEachen, Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for External Affairs, announced today that Canada had assumed the chairmanship of the Chemical Weapons Working Group for the 1983 session of the Committee on Disarmament. Mr. Donald S. McPhail, Canadian Ambassador to the Committee on Disarmament, will chair the Working Group which is engaged in negotiating a ban on chemical weapons.

The negotiation of a chemical weapons convention has long been a priority of Canadian arms control and disarmament policy. Canada has been an active participant in the Working Group since it was first established in 1980. Addressing the Committee on Disarmament at its opening plenary on February 1, Mr. MacEachen said "The time is right for progress this year towards a treaty on the prohibition of the development, production and stockpiling of chemical weapons and the destruction of existing stocks. We intend to participate vigorously along with others in seeking to realize the maximum from the present opportunity."

Canada has allocated funds to enable Canadian technical experts to participate for longer periods beginning with the 1983 session. Canadian expertise is being applied on the essential and difficult verification issues. Canadian experts work closely with experts from other member countries and some non-member countries on these and the other complex issues involved.

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The Chemical Weapons Working Group is one of several such groups established by the forty-member Committee on Disarmament, the multilateral negotiating body in Geneva, which meets each year from early February until late August. The working groups have facilitated consideration in depth of issues on its agenda.

Mr. McPhail was appointed Ambassador to the Committee on Disarmament in 1979 at which time he also became Permanent Representative to the Office of the United Nations in Geneva.