



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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GENERAL AND COMPLETE DISARMAMENT

Statement in the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly by Mr. W.B. Nesbitt, Vice-Chairman of the Canadian Delegation, on November 2, 1959.

The Committee is committed by the draft resolution before us to the proposition that disarmament is the most important problem facing the world today. This idea is not new, since disarmament has been recognized as an important problem throughout most of the twentieth century and as both an urgent and important one ever since the end of the Second World War. The new fact in the present situation is that 82 countries, by putting their names to the draft resolution, have subscribed directly to this proposition.

Of course we have had resolutions in this Assembly before which have recognized the importance of comprehensive disarmament and have set out procedures for dealing with it. We have even had resolutions on the subject with joint East-West co-sponsorship. For example, in 1954 there was a resolution, the original draft of which was prepared by the Canadian Delegation of the day, and which was eventually co-sponsored by Canada, the U.S.S.R., the U.S.A., the U.K. and France. That resolution, which was adopted unanimously, expressed the General Assembly's recognition that the continuing development of armaments increased the urgency of the need for a solution to the disarmament problem and concluded that a further effort should be made to reach agreement on comprehensive and co-ordinated proposals to be embodied in a draft international disarmament convention. We all know only too well the fate of the negotiations which were undertaken in response to that unanimous General Assembly appeal. This is no time to look backwards, but it does seem to me to be necessary to point out, as others have done, that unanimity with respect to an objective does not necessarily mean that the objective can easily be realized.

I think that the question at issue at the moment is not whether the goal of comprehensive disarmament under effective control is desirable - we seem all to have subscribed to that - but rather what steps we are ready to take to avoid the risk of mutual destruction.

The broad objective of a world without arms is one which the Government and the people of Canada have long cherished. During the years we have sought to devise means of arriving at that objective by contributing to a number of outline plans for comprehensive disarmament, as well as to plans for an initial stage. All of these plans have foundered, not on differences over objectives but rather on problems relating to the stages of transition from the present situation to a disarmed world. It is in this light that the various proposals put forward must be analysed in detail in due course. It would not be appropriate for such analysis to be attempted here at this stage. It is appropriate for all proposals, together with other comments and suggestions made, to be considered in detail in the ten-power Committee which, under the terms of the resolution before us, will have all of the relevant records available to it.

It seems to my Delegation that it is useful to draw a distinction between the discussion of principles which must underlie any viable international agreement to which all states are to be parties and the process of negotiation designed to find a solid basis for agreement on specific measures. In the field of negotiation it is clear that the initiative rests with the major powers. Our satisfaction at the establishment of the ten-power Disarmament Committee is based primarily on the fact that a forum in which the major powers have agreed to pursue such negotiations has been created. In agreeing to serve on that Committee Canada was motivated by the desire to facilitate successful negotiations and will direct every effort towards that end.

At the same time the General Assembly, both in the present discussions and in subsequent discussions in its Disarmament Commission, can make a useful contribution by trying to establish the principles under which disarmament and the general regulation and reduction of armaments in accordance with the terms of Article 11 of the Charter can be carried out. The ultimate responsibility of the United Nations for disarmament is generally recognized and the Disarmament Commission should, of course, be kept in being and informed of the progress in the ten-power Committee. That Committee in turn will have the benefit of views expressed here at the present session of the General Assembly and subsequently, we hope, in the Disarmament Commission. In this way those members of the United Nations which are not members of the ten-power Committee will have an effective means of expressing their views as to how the Committee's objectives can best be carried out. As the Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs said in his statement in the general debate on September 24, the middle-sized and smaller powers must have an opportunity of being heard, for disarmament is of the deepest concern to all mankind. In Canada's work on the committee we shall at all times keep these considerations very much in mind.

It is apparent from what I said earlier in my remarks that the Canadian Delegation, in common with other delegations, is in complete sympathy with the broad objectives of the resolution before us. Even in the absence of concrete solutions to particular political problems the general international political climate is itself important to the solution of disarmament. We have already had evidence of this during the present debate. The series of meetings which the principal powers have embarked upon this year, the establishment of personal contacts through exchanges of visits by leading statesmen and the improvement of social and cultural relationships between states have all contributed to the creation of an atmosphere favourable to the initiation of negotiations of the sort which are now envisaged. The recent declaration by the President of the United States and the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the U.S.S.R. that differences must be settled by negotiations and not by force can only contribute to the same ends. This specific undertaking, reinforcing as it does the undertakings contained in the Charter, certainly helps to create a favourable atmosphere for the negotiations which are to begin in the New Year in the Disarmament Committee. On the other hand, any revival of the cold war would make the process of negotiations on disarmament more difficult and would impede the achievement of the goals we all so earnestly desire.

Any development is useful which contributes to the search for a basis of mutual confidence which is a precondition for disarmament and secure peace. Whether it be in the political arena or in the field of armaments control and limitation, every opportunity should be seized, as long as the balance of security is maintained at each stage. There are several areas where measures could be taken which, while not properly disarmament, would contribute substantially to the necessary restoration of confidence between nations and at the same time provide experience in the mechanism of inspection, control and verification which could be of the utmost value in tackling the much more complex problems of disarmament proper.

One such area is the suspension of nuclear weapons test explosions. The extensive and serious negotiations on this subject have already demonstrated clearly that even in a relatively narrow and specific problem there is a wide range of complex issues to be resolved. We hope that the pioneering work which has been done by the U.S.A., the U.K. and the U.S.S.R. and is proceeding in the conference which has just resumed in Geneva will provide a pattern which in some respects at least will be applicable to other problems of disarmament. In particular we hope that a solution will be found to the central problem of how one reaches decisions in the control organ regarding inspections which may provide a useful guide for other deliberations. The basis of confidence which is necessary for the success of negotiations on any of the wider problems can only be achieved where there is supervised disarmament. There is therefore an inseparable relationship between disarming and control, which must be negotiated in parallel and put into effect together.

The same considerations, that is, the establishment of confidence and the gaining of experience in methods of inspection and supervision, apply to measures for the prevention of surprise attack. My Delegation sincerely regrets that the negotiations on this matter, in which Canada was participating, were suspended at the end of last year, for reasons which have already been made known. We consider those negotiations should be resumed and hope that the creation of the ten-power Committee will provide an opportunity for further consideration of measures for preventing or controlling the danger of surprise attack.

Several delegations have already made in the present debate suggestions concerning matters which might appropriately be taken up by the Disarmament Commission. I am thinking in particular of the questions suggested by the distinguished Representative of the U.S.A. concerning institutions to preserve international peace and security and to promote the rule of law when all nations will have laid down their arms. Specifically he asked what type of international force should be established, what principles of international law would govern the use of such a force and what internal security forces, in precise terms, would be required by the nations of the world if existing armaments were abolished. In addition the distinguished Representative of Italy has reminded us that total and general disarmament would imply revision of those provisions of the Charter which assumed that we might achieve partial but not total disarmament and which therefore presupposed the existence of national forces which could be placed at the disposal of the United Nations when needed for the maintenance of peace.

These are big and fundamental questions, which would have to be looked into by the international community in connection with discussion of means to achieve the goal of total disarmament. The Disarmament Commission of the General Assembly would seem to be an appropriate body to consider such matters. In this connection it would seem necessary to give careful attention to each of the interim stages on the path to total disarmament. During this period it is evident, as has been stated by several representatives, that progress in disarmament would be greatly facilitated by the development of effective institutions for collective security. This is a good time for the United Nations to take a fresh look at the provisions of the Charter in this respect. The collapse 12 years ago of the negotiations leading to measures for implementing Article 43 was due to reasons which were both political and technical. In the present political atmosphere, it may be that some of the technical reasons for the collapse - such as factors relating to disproportions in forces of various types - are no longer as relevant as they were. It may be timely therefore to re-examine together the relevant provisions of Chapter VII of the Charter. In any event, during the period while national forces

are being reduced in a step-by-step approach to comprehensive disarmament, we feel from our own experience that greater use might be made of the procedures which already exist for the provision of national contingents for United Nations observational and supervisory work. Another look might also be taken at the various suggestions for standby arrangements with a view to greater utilization of such procedures.

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