



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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TOWARD THE CESSATION OF NUCLEAR TESTS

Address by General E.L.M. Burns, Representative of Canada in the First Committee of the United Nations, on October 30, 1961.

I am sure there is not one of us in this room who is not dismayed by the fact that this morning the Soviet Union set off another and a most awesome explosion in a long series of explosions of nuclear weapons in the atmosphere. We are filled with anxiety at the frightening increase to the cloud of radioactive debris that hangs over all peoples. In a resolution that was unanimously adopted by the Assembly last Friday, the very deep concern which the danger of radioactive fall-out evokes throughout the world was clearly recorded. Out of its fear for the safety of this and future generations, the Assembly, on the same day, also made a specific and solemn appeal to the Soviet Union to refrain from exploding the especially fearsome 50-megaton bomb which Mr. Khrushchev had threatened would be detonated before the end of this month.

That threat has now been fulfilled with a cynical and dangerous disregard for the universal wish that mankind might be spared the consequences of such a reckless experiment. The exercise of wise judgment in the Soviet Union could have prevented this enormous wrong. As it is, nothing can be done to dispel the radioactive dust that now is finding its way over all our countries. In the circumstances I must, on behalf of the Canadian people, express abhorrence at this event and deplore the manner in which the Soviet Union has flouted the desires of all peoples and the appeal of this United Nations General Assembly.

On September 7, addressing the Canadian House of Commons, the Secretary of State for External Affairs said:

"We must never forget that the United Nations is the best place we have in which to focus world opinion. The big question in my mind is this: have the Soviet Union gone so far that they are now preparing to ignore world opinion?"

The Soviet disdain for the solemn appeal of this Assembly poses that question in stark and grave terms. Our protest at this time is based on the conviction that the universal revulsion which this Soviet action will excite may yet serve the purpose of persuading the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics to resume a position of co-operating with world opinion as expressed in and through the United Nations.

Indian Resolution

We are at present debating the Indian draft resolution contained in document A/C.1/L.283/Rev. 2. Doubts have been expressed in previous statements this morning whether, in view of what has happened, there is very much use in passing a resolution calling for an unsupported moratorium. The Canadian Government had decided before this last event to support this draft resolution, and we still intend to do so and to vote for it. In this statement which I am making, we shall give our reasons for so doing and shall also give our views on the general problem of what should be done to ensure that the testing of nuclear weapons is stopped and stays stopped. I apologize if I repeat, in order to make our position clear, things that have been said by many other delegations in their statements on this subject.

The first reason why nuclear testing should be stopped is that radioactive nuclear fall-out is a danger to health. We do not know how great a danger it is; scientific studies have not been conclusive on this point. But it is agreed that all exposure to radioactivity can affect the human body. It is further agreed that the greater the exposure, the greater the danger. Furthermore, fear of radioactive fall-out is widespread among all peoples in the world, and their fear and anxiety should be respected. This alone is sufficient reason for calling for nuclear testing to cease.

But there is another reason, a reason about which there can be no doubt, and this is that nuclear testing is for the purpose of arming the nuclear powers with more and bigger nuclear weapons. As we have been told so many times, the nuclear powers already have more than enough such weapons to kill half of humanity.

The nuclear powers assert that they have been or may be obliged to resume testing because their national security requires it. This, in the view of the Canadian delegation, is in the long term a grave error. A series of tests conducted by one side brings about a subsequent series of tests conducted by the other -- and this is the essence of and the most dangerous part of the arms race. Can masses of nuclear weapons confer any security when it is certain that if the powers owning them put them to use, they will go down together in mutual destruction -- destruction which will extend far beyond their own borders? The existence of these weapons is a threat to the nations which possess them, to the nations which do not possess them and to humanity at large.

These are the reasons why, in our view, nuclear testing must be stopped. What should be done to stop it? My delegation believes that the General Assembly should in the first instance call upon the nuclear powers which are carrying out or are capable of carrying out tests to refrain from further testing. In spite of what has happened we still believe that such a request should be made. The draft resolution presented by Ghana, India, Nepal, United Arab Republic and others appears to us to be suitable to express the urgent wish of all nations in this respect. As I said, Canada is prepared to vote for it, but we draw attention to the last phrase in operative paragraph 2 which reads:

"Earnestly urges the powers concerned to refrain from further test explosions pending the conclusion of necessary internationally binding agreements in regard to tests or general and complete disarmament."

This and the succeeding paragraph, though expressed rather vaguely, seem to be intended to meet the positions which have been stated by the major nuclear powers in regard to the so-called moratorium, that is, in regard to their making a declaration - a simple verbal promise -- that they will refrain from nuclear testing. What are these positions?

U.S. Attitude

The representatives of the United States have made it clear that they are resolutely opposed to a further uncontrolled moratorium, having been deceived by the Soviet Union's violation of the agreement not to test which was in force during the Geneva negotiations. As a consequence of the Soviet Union's action, the United States may find that it has been placed at a relative disadvantage in the development of nuclear weapons. The United States is therefore unwilling again to trust such an uninspected, unsupervised agreement.

We must say that we have much sympathy with the viewpoint expressed by the United States delegation, and I quote the proverb, "Once bitten, twice shy". We feel that we owe it to the representative of the United States to say that Canada appreciates fully that the United States respected the wishes of the United Nations General Assembly as expressed in resolutions 1577 and 1578 of last year, and many preceding resolutions, and did not initiate any nuclear weapons tests until after the Soviet Union had tested large bombs in the atmosphere and had made it clear that it would not accept the request of the President of the United States and Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to put an end to the series of tests which it had embarked upon. Furthermore, the four tests made by the United States have been carried out underground and have hence produced no radioactive fall-out.

The representatives of the United States have emphasized several times that their country is ready to sign at once a treaty banning nuclear tests permanently, under effective international control, the treaty which had been elaborated in the negotiations at Geneva and which to be completed requires only agreement on three points. This was explained very clearly to the Committee by the representatives of both the United Kingdom and the United States. But the Soviet Union has not agreed to negotiate a solution to these three points at issue.

Essence of East-West Disagreement

What was the essence of the three points of disagreement? Basically they relate to the degree of control and verification which the Soviet Union is willing to accept in order to permit the implementation of a satisfactory treaty to ban tests permanently. The Soviet Union professes to believe that the control measures necessary would be used for spying unless their own citizens were able to exercise a veto over every aspect of the practical functioning of the control system. This morbid apprehension of espionage seems to us very extraordinary in a great nation like the Soviet Union, which undoubtedly possesses such great power. Why is the Soviet Union so reluctant to impose upon itself a few minor limitations on its national sovereignty in the interests of international peace and security? We shall probably have more to say about this important problem during our discussion of item 3 of our agenda, General Disarmament.

I would suggest that representatives of the non-aligned or uncommitted nations should examine carefully the unresolved points in the draft treaty for the cessation of nuclear weapons testing. They are clearly set forth in the speeches of the United States and United Kingdom representatives, which are in the verbatim reports of the proceedings of this Committee. Furthermore, the proceedings of the Geneva Conference on the Discontinuance of Nuclear Weapon Tests are available in a number of documents. After such study, representatives could decide for themselves whether it is likely that the proposed control machinery could be used for espionage and whether this possibility should really prevent completing and putting into effect a treaty on the lines drafted.

I know that representatives here are busy men and that, when the days' meetings and obligatory social engagements are finished, there is not much time or energy left for careful study of the complicated questions with which we are faced, especially in the disarmament sphere. But this is a vital question: what is the dividing line between espionage and the reliable control, inspection and verification of treaty provisions with respect to the cessation of nuclear tests or disarmament? It would be helpful if all those who will speak on this subject would inform themselves as fully as possible as to what the problem of control really is.

Now, what is the position of the Soviet Union in regard to the cessation of nuclear testing? I quote from the letter of 26 September from the Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union, document A/4893:

" ... unless persistent and resolute efforts are made to achieve general and complete disarmament there can be no guarantee that tomorrow other states too will not begin testing their own nuclear weapons, even if a treaty for the cessation of tests has, in fact, been concluded between the three powers ...

"If states carry out general and complete disarmament under effective international control, if all types of weapons, including nuclear weapons, are abolished and armies disbanded, then the incentive for the development of nuclear weapons will disappear too, and with it the incentive for testing them. There will then be no temptation for anyone to test nuclear weapons on the ground, underground, in the atmosphere or in outer space ..." (A/4893, Pages 9 and 10)

At our meeting on 17 October the representative of the Soviet Union, Mr. Zorin, had the following to say:

"If there is a real desire to put an end to all tests, that desire can be met in present conditions only if the United States, the Soviet Union and other interested powers sit down at a table and elaborate a programme of general and complete disarmament ..."
(A/C.1/PV.1168, Page 82)

He went on:

" ... an isolated solution of the problem is impossible in present conditions. Of course, a resolution can be adopted. But in present conditions we do not see that such a resolution would have much meaning."
(Ibid.)

The results of the resolution that we passed last Friday show that Mr. Zorin certainly knew what he was talking about.

Reconciling Rival Positions

Now we have the position of the two great powers. The United States is not prepared to promise not to recommence nuclear testing unless there is an effective treaty preventing it; and the Soviet Union says that nuclear testing can disappear only if there is general and complete disarmament. Is it possible to reconcile these two positions? The Canadian delegation believes that it may be. The key is that both the Soviet Union and the United States have related the cessation of nuclear testing to their respective plans or programmes for general and complete disarmament. The United States programme, announced by President Kennedy on 25 September to the General Assembly, provides that in its first stage:

"States that have not acceded to a treaty effectively prohibiting the testing of nuclear weapons shall do so."

When this was written into the programme, the United States still hoped that the Geneva negotiators would finally agree on a treaty.

The Soviet Union, in numerous statements besides the quotations I have given, says that nuclear testing will cease only if there is an agreement on general and complete disarmament. What exactly does this mean? It has argued, and I have quoted the arguments, that a separate treaty on the cessation of nuclear testing would be ineffective. It must, therefore, be presumed that it thinks a simple declaration by both sides that they will cease nuclear testing would be even less effective. Its whole argument is for the immediate adoption of the Soviet Union's plan for general and complete disarmament.

We wonder whether this means that the Soviet Union intends to go on testing nuclear weapons, as it has been doing for the past two months, at intervals whenever it suits its purpose, until all the details involved in a treaty for general and complete disarmament are agreed to and the treaty is signed. Such an intention would certainly not indicate a serious desire to negotiate in good faith on general disarmament. Continued testing would provoke an intensification of the arms race and would not limit it. My delegation is firmly of the view that the Soviet Union, to demonstrate the sincerity of its frequently professed desire for general and complete disarmament, must not only refrain from further testing of nuclear weapons but must show its willingness to enter into what the Indian draft resolution calls "internationally binding agreements" with respect to the permanent cessation and prohibition of nuclear weapon tests.

As I have already pointed out, both the major nuclear powers have in one way or another related the problem of the cessation of nuclear testing to their plans for general disarmament. Furthermore, Paragraph 8 of their joint statement of agreed principles to guide future disarmament negotiations includes the following clause:

" ... efforts to ensure early agreement on an implementation of measures of disarmament should be undertaken without prejudicing progress on agreement on the total programme ..." (A/4879, Page 5)

The Canadian delegation suggests that an agreement on the cessation of nuclear testing could be one of the first measures of disarmament to be negotiated and put into effect. Nuclear testing is an activity undertaken solely in the interests of creating new and more effective armaments and is hence a major factor in the arms race, which is designed to increase armaments. It has been argued that the cessation of nuclear testing is not in itself a measure of disarmament, but, if the purpose of nuclear testing is the development and perfection of nuclear armaments, then it follows that the cessation of nuclear testing is a measure of disarmament.

It seems evident from the stated attitudes of both the United States and the Soviet Union that a resolution which simply calls for the cessation of nuclear tests will not be enough and that it must be supplemented by another calling for the conclusion of a treaty which would provide a permanent guarantee against the resumption of tests. In this connexion, if we look at resolutions 1577 and 1578 adopted at the fifteenth session of the General Assembly, we find that both these resolutions combined these ideas. Both resolutions called on the nuclear powers negotiating at Geneva to reach an agreement on the cessation of testing of nuclear weapons and, pending the conclusion of an agreement, to continue their voluntary suspension of tests. Canada recognizes the urgent need to reinforce the moral obligation of states to refrain from testing by a judicially binding agreement accompanied by effective international controls. For this reason my delegation will support the draft resolution in document A/C.1/L.280 submitted by the United Kingdom and the United States.

As for the resumption of negotiations on the cessation of nuclear testing, the Canadian delegation believes that there is no reason why this should not take place immediately. The distinguished and experienced men who were representing the United Kingdom, the United States and the Soviet Union at the Geneva talks are here in New York and, if so authorized, could resume their work at once.

It is also for consideration whether those nations which have been negotiating so far might be joined by other nations which have developed nuclear weapons or have the potential to do so. That is a matter on which there might be some expression of opinion in this Committee.

Recapitulation

To conclude, I should like to recapitulate Canadian views regarding the most effective manner to halt nuclear tests and the action this Assembly should take at this time.

First, the General Assembly should adopt as quickly as possible a resolution demanding the immediate end of nuclear weapon tests by all nations and in all environments.

Secondly, in addition to bringing nuclear tests to a halt immediately, Canada wholeheartedly supports the view that the nuclear powers should return to negotiations with respect to the problem of nuclear tests without delay. They should rapidly settle the differences which separate them, and agree on a binding treaty to put a definitive stop to nuclear testing. This Assembly should, therefore, give its full endorsement to the draft resolution embodying this view which has been submitted by the delegations of the United States and the United Kingdom.

Thirdly, it is necessary to recognize that the Soviet Union is at present unwilling to consider the question of nuclear tests except if this question is negotiated in the context of disarmament discussions. If the Soviet Union insists on this position, Canada would see no objection to having the cessation of nuclear tests discussed on the context of disarmament as the question of highest priority. However, my Delegation believes that it is so urgent to reach a binding agreement on the cessation of nuclear weapons testing that its consideration should not be delayed until negotiation begins on other disarmament measures or on the broad question of general and complete disarmament. It could be and should be, we think, the first step in the programme of general and complete disarmament. We believe also that the negotiations on disarmament which were broken off in June 1960 should be resumed at the earliest possible moment, and we shall have more to say on this during the debate on item 3 of our agenda.

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