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No. 36

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
MAY 18, 1972

CANADA RATIFIES SEABED ARMS CONTROL TREATY

DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
MINISTÈRE DES AFFAIRES EXTÉRIEURES

The Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Mitchell Sharp, announced today that Canada has ratified the Seabed Arms Control Treaty. Instruments of Ratification were deposited on May 17 by Canada's representatives in London, Washington and Moscow, where the treaty is open for signature and ratification.

The Seabed Arms Control Treaty, the full title of which is the Treaty on the Prohibition of the Emplacement of Nuclear Weapons and Weapons of Mass Destruction on the Seabed and Ocean Floor and the Subsoil Thereof, was negotiated in the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament and approved by the United Nations General Assembly in the fall of 1970. In announcing Canada's ratification, Mr. Sharp described the treaty as an important step towards the exclusion of the seabed from the arms race.

The treaty prohibits the emplacement of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction (i.e., chemical and biological weapons) on the seabed and ocean floor beyond a 12-mile coastal zone. It also prohibits the emplacement of structures, launching facilities, or installations designed for storing, testing or using such weapons. It does not prohibit the emplacement of conventional weapons that are not part of systems for mass destruction or any other under-water weapons systems that are not actually placed on the ocean floor (i.e., nuclear submarines).

The Canadian Delegation to the Geneva Conference of the Committee on Disarmament played an active role in the negotiations leading up to the treaty. Canada was among the first states to urge that the widest possible range of arms control measures should be extended to the widest possible area of the seabed and ocean floor. A number of Canadian proposals, particularly those relating to verification procedures, were incorporated into the final text.

Canada's ratification is accompanied by an interpretative declaration intended to make clear Canada's position on a number of law of the sea issues related to the treaty. The declaration enunciates Canada's view that:

(a) the treaty cannot be interpreted as allowing states to place non-prohibited (i.e., conventional) weapons on the seabed and ocean floor beyond the continental shelf, or to use this area for anything but peaceful purposes;

(b) the treaty cannot be interpreted as allowing any state other than the coastal state to place non-prohibited weapons on its continental shelf; and

(c) the treaty cannot be interpreted as in any way restricting the right of the coastal state to carry out inspection and removal of any foreign weapons or components or weapons systems on its continental shelf.

The Secretary of State for External Affairs explained that the treaty neither affirms nor prejudices the position of any state party on any of these issues but that it was considered desirable to put Canada's own views on record at the time of ratification.

The treaty will now enter into force, having been ratified by 22 governments including the depository governments (Britain, USA and USSR). The Secretary of State for External Affairs welcomed this development as a major step forward in the long and difficult process of achieving a comprehensive system of arms control and disarmament. He emphasized the determination of the parties to the Seabed Arms Control Treaty, as expressed in the preamble to the treaty, to continue negotiations concerning further measures leading to this end in respect of that 75% of the earth's surface lying under the seas and oceans of the world.