



Statements and Speeches

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ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT THE MOST URGENT ISSUE OF OUR TIMES

Statement by Mr. J. Alan Beesley, Ambassador for Disarmament, in the First Committee Debates on Disarmament of the Thirty-Seventh Session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, November 3, 1982

...The most pressing issue of our times is arms control and disarmament. It is at once the most serious, the most controversial and the most urgent. The amount of activity in this field, amongst nations, and across a broad range of public opinion has been a major theme of this year. One can point to other years when agreements were concluded, signed and ratified. While 1982 has not been such a year, it nevertheless represents a critical juncture in the arms control and disarmament process.

When this committee convened a year ago, there were no negotiations on nuclear weapons. This past year has seen the resumption of the crucially important talks between the United States and the Soviet Union on strategic arms limitation and reduction, as well as the earlier beginning of the related talks on intermediate range nuclear forces. It may be that our survival will depend on the outcome of these talks; our interest in their success is fundamental and, indeed, progress in talks on nuclear issues is in the interests of all, because all will be affected by their results and not only the parties directly concerned. Not surprisingly, the Canadian Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Allan J. MacEachen, emphasized in his address to the General Assembly on September 27, that Canada strongly supports these negotiations.

I should like now to turn to a number of issues on our agenda.

Nuclear matters

Nuclear test ban: At the second Special Session on Disarmament [UNSSOD II], Prime Minister Trudeau reaffirmed Canada's commitment to the achievement of a comprehensive test ban treaty as one of the elements in a coherent strategy for curbing the nuclear arms race, a "strategy of suffocation". In the multilateral negotiating body in Geneva, the establishment of a nuclear test ban working group is significant. We regret that it was not possible to agree on a work program for this group, but are confident that, despite the difficulties, work will proceed on real measures to verify an eventual test ban treaty.

We note the contribution of the Soviet Union in presenting a text on the outline of a test ban treaty. At the same time, we note that the Soviet proposal contains a number of elements which cause us concern. The question of a moratorium is one such element. Would a moratorium on testing simply be tantamount to agreeing to a treaty

without ensuring that the necessary mechanisms for its enforcement were in place? We believe it would. Would such a development be in the interests of all parties to any such agreement? We strongly believe it would not. Also troubling is the reference to peaceful nuclear explosions. From a scientific and technical point of view it is undeniable that there is no distinction between peaceful and weapons related nuclear explosions. Thus, we will have to look very closely at any wording that suggests otherwise.

Seismic verification: Canada will continue to play an active role in resolving questions related to seismic verification of a test ban agreement. The discussions in Geneva on an international seismic data exchange, we believe, have shown the potential of enabling participating states to ascertain satisfactorily compliance with a test ban treaty on the part of other states. Indeed, we believe that the exchange could – and should – be fully operational at an early date and in advance of the treaty itself.

Approaches to nuclear issues: At the second Special Session, Prime Minister Trudeau proposed a policy of stabilization which, he said, had two complementary components – the suffocation strategy which seeks to inhibit the development of new weapons systems, and our negotiating approach aimed at qualitative and quantitative reductions in nuclear arsenals designed to achieve a stable nuclear balance at lower levels.

This is what we mean by “freeze”: the halt of the technological momentum of the arms race should be accomplished by freezing at the initial or testing stage of the development of new weapons systems and the number of nuclear arms should be frozen at lower levels. Here it is necessary to make two points. This approach cannot be applied unilaterally: it envisages concrete negotiations between nuclear powers. Second, we note that a number of other kinds of proposal for freeze have already been put forward. Many suffer from the same fundamental flaw: not being verifiable, they do not contribute to creating the conditions of stability we all seek.

**Chemical
weapons**

Chemical weapons convention: For the third year, the Chemical Weapons Working Group of the Committee on Disarmament has registered encouraging progress. Several working papers were tabled. While this difficult subject requires further work, we consider that conditions are right to move forward on the negotiation of a convention on the prohibition of the development, production and stockpiling of chemical weapons and the destruction of existing stocks. While we do not underestimate the technical difficulties still before us, we are encouraged by the contributions made by all in the committee and, indeed, by a number outside of it.

Use of chemical weapons: The past year has seen the continuation of the investigation of the reports of the use of chemical weapons which this committee launched two years ago. Canada has sought to contribute to the work of the Experts Group by submitting three reports, including an independent study on mycotoxins in certain

regions in Southeast Asia. We trust that the report of the Experts Group will contribute to the development of procedures by which confidence can be developed and maintained in existing agreements, thereby contributing to the conclusion of future agreements.

Outer space

Another positive development in the Committee on Disarmament was, for the first time, its consideration of the subject of arms control related to outer space. As a contribution to the task of defining the issues, Canada tabled a working paper. In this committee during the past two years and at the second Special Session on Disarmament, we have drawn attention to the urgency of addressing the development of new weaponry for use in outer space as well as the inadequacies of the Outer Space Treaty of 1967. Quite apart from the inherent danger that arms competition could bring, there is the additional danger that such a competition could be destabilizing....

I have been necessarily selective in illustrating the range of concerns that are before the international community. There has been a number of significant developments in 1982. These I have discussed. I have not discussed, but would nonetheless like to draw attention to, the United Nations study on conventional disarmament. Bearing in mind that at least 80 per cent of the world's military expenditures are on conventional arms, this is also a subject of fundamental importance to us all.

UNSSOD II

I would like to conclude by referring to the second Special Session on Disarmament. Many have already commented on the results of UNSSOD II. Many have expressed their disappointment at the outcome. Yet, the second Special Session has shown the central role and importance of the United Nations in the international dialogue on arms control and international security matters. This dialogue has been maintained and, through the world disarmament campaign, will more than ever involve international public opinion. At UNSSOD II, the consensus of the international community was renewed that the objectives set down at the first Special Session for the continuation of the arms control and disarmament process had bridged not only the divisions between East and West, but also divisions between North and South. The preservation of consensus on our commonly shared goals, I believe, was a major accomplishment. We might, therefore, look to the future, certainly with a good measure of sobriety, but also with confidence that we can move toward the accomplishment of a number of essential tasks before us.

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