

STATEMENT DISCOURS

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85/36

Response of the Government
of Canada to the Royal
Society of Canada's report
on the environmental
consequences of nuclear
war, tabled in the House
of Commons by the
Right Honourable Joe Clark,
Secretary of State for
External Affairs

OTTAWA

June 27, 1985.

In February of this year, the Minister of the Environment received a report from the Royal Society of Canada entitled "The Environmental Consequences of Nuclear War". The following is the Government's response to that report.

The Royal Society's study focuses on the possibility of a nuclear winter and its consequences for Canada. The conclusions of the study are in basic agreement with the findings of other scientific organizations such as the Swedish Academy of Science and the U.S. National Academy of Science. The principal conclusion is that a major drop in global temperature could follow a nuclear exchange. This phenomenon, popularly called nuclear winter, is the result of smoke and dust particles reducing the incoming energy from the sun.

The Royal Society puts forward many recommendations for further research to reduce the current scientific uncertainties surrounding the nuclear winter hypothesis. These uncertainties concern, for example, the amount of smoke that could be generated by burning cities and forests; how that smoke would be distributed in the atmosphere; the magnitude of the drop in surface temperatures; and most importantly, how these factors will affect agriculture, livestock and fish, other species and, of course, the survival of man.

There is general agreement within the Government that the nuclear winter hypothesis is scientifically credible even though the details regarding its magnitude and duration are subject to great uncertainties. Some of the scientific uncertainties may be reduced by continuing research within existing programmes.

The Government agrees with the Royal Society that any Canadian studies pertaining to nuclear winter should be fully co-ordinated with similar efforts in other countries. With this in mind, copies of the report will be forwarded to the United Nations in accordance with the resolution (39/148F) passed during the 39th session of the UN General Assembly. During the last session of the General Assembly, Canada stressed the importance for nations to carry out studies on the phenomenon and to report their findings to the United Nations as part of an international undertaking to reduce the possibility of a nuclear war. The submission of the Royal Society's report to the United Nations will serve as a useful Canadian contribution to international recognition that in a nuclear war there would be no winners.

The Royal Society's study does support, however, the basic tenet of civil defence that there would be survivors. It is the humanitarian duty of government to have at least modest plans to increase the number of possible survivors. Current civil defence planning has concentrated on problems related to short-term survival. The nuclear winter hypothesis introduces new longer-term concerns, and the Government accepts the Royal Society's recommendation that our post-nuclear attack preparedness, including the implications for agriculture, transportation, communication and general living conditions, should be re-examined.

Beyond its scientific nature, the Royal Society report also has national security implications. It is clear that a nuclear conflict would be catastrophic. This reinforces our basic conviction that any nuclear war must be prevented. Consequently, the Government continues to support NATO and its deterrence policy which has ensured our security for over 35 years. Our adversaries must appreciate that no nuclear war can be won in the traditional understanding of victory. The Royal Society Report reinforces this basic conviction. It follows, therefore, that we must continue to do all that is within our power to deter the initiation of all war.

In this regard, Canada will maintain the high priority we have assigned to our participation in those multilateral arms control fora - Geneva, Stockholm, Vienna - in which we have a direct negotiating role. At the same time, we have welcomed the resumption of United States-USSR negotiations in Geneva and support the USA in its efforts to achieve a more stable strategic relationship at the lowest possible balanced level of nuclear forces.

Finally, the federal Government wishes to thank the Royal Society of Canada and its committee of experts for preparing this Report. They have provided a unique and thought-provoking perspective concerning the possible implications for Canada of a nuclear war.