



Statements and Speeches

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ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT

A Statement by Mr. G.A.H. Pearson, Representative of Canada to the First Committee of the Thirty-fourth Regular Session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, October 23, 1979

The difference between the goals of disarmament and the realities of international security has always been wide. The common objective of virtually all governments is to achieve undiminished security at lower levels of armaments. Yet our common practice has been to seek greater security at higher levels of armaments. Eighteen months after the Special Session on Disarmament (SSOD), this discrepancy is especially glaring. That session helped to raise the hopes of many people that the dangers of modern weapons and of the arms race would be more fully taken into account in the policies of governments. They have been disappointed. This disappointment may turn into cynicism and indifference unless we are better able to keep these goals and realities in balance. The goals of disarmament can be articulated and explained with greater modesty and realism, without giving them up. Expenditures on defence can be reconciled with initiatives in arms control without the need for apology. History does not bear out the view that peace is always to be found in strength. But neither has it been achieved through weakness. Propaganda and slogans mislead governments as much as they confuse the public.

Of one thing we can be sure, however. A nuclear war involving the weapons now available would destroy civilization as we know it. This has been true for at least a generation. It is this fact which has given special urgency to our annual debate on disarmament, but it is also this fact which has convinced many people that nuclear war will never happen. We all know that this technology cannot be made to disappear. On the contrary, we know that nuclear energy is widely regarded as a possible escape from a situation where traditional sources of energy become inadequate to modern needs. Even if this were not the case, we could not abolish fissionable materials or the knowledge of how to make use of them for weapons purposes. Our immediate tasks are rather to improve means of control of these weapons and associated technologies, and to reduce their numbers by the negotiation of agreements amongst the nuclear weapons powers in the first instance. We hope very much in this respect that China will take its place soon in the Committee on Disarmament.

The U.S.A.-Soviet Treaty on Strategic Offensive Arms of last June is an example of such an agreement. Canada has welcomed the Treaty as a measure to help to ensure the stability of the strategic balance between East and West. We look forward to its coming into force at an early date. In our view, the Treaty will help to minimize the risk of nuclear war, to lay the basis for greater confidence between the major nuclear powers and to encourage further arms control agreements between them. We have noted in particular the fact that the Treaty places restraints on the modernization of strategic offensive systems. We have long believed that such restraints are important

if a credible balance of strategic deterrence is to be maintained. The inclusion of an agreed data base and counting rules is also a step forward in arms control.

That is why we think a comprehensive test ban (CTB) is also important, and why we have advocated the opening, at an appropriate stage, of negotiations on a cessation and prohibition of the production of fissionable materials for weapons purposes. These kinds of agreements would help to slow the momentum of weapons development in nuclear weapon states. They would also make a contribution to the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. Both objectives are vital to the maintenance of global stability in the years ahead.

We regret that the Committee on Disarmament has not yet been given the opportunity to begin work on a CTB. While we do not think that calls by this Assembly for a negotiating timetable are always helpful, we do believe that concrete action towards a complete ban is necessary soon, especially in view of the convening of the Second Review Conference on the NPT in August 1980. According to authoritative public sources, there were more tests of nuclear weapons in 1978 than in any year since 1970. At the least, the numbers of tests must be reduced if confidence in the objectives agreed as long ago as 1963 is to be maintained. A further step along the road to nuclear disarmament would be a cessation and ban on the production of fissionable materials for weapons purposes and other nuclear explosive devices. Partial measures of nuclear arms control, including a so-called cut-off, are to be preferred to comprehensive negotiations which have little prospect of success. We acknowledge that the verification of an agreement not to produce such material for weapons purposes would pose difficult technical and political questions. These questions need examination, even if negotiations are deemed inappropriate for the time being, and we may wish to consider how to bring this about.

We are pleased that the Committee on Disarmament has looked into the question of security assurances to non-nuclear weapon states, and has made some modest progress. We think the Committee should return to this subject early in 1980. It is entirely understandable that non-nuclear weapon states not part of a system of nuclear deterrence should be interested in assurances against nuclear attack. These weapons, as I have said, are not soon going to disappear. That being the case, pledges of non-use by those states that possess nuclear weapons are of considerable significance, even in the carefully defined circumstances which each nuclear-weapon state has put on the record. It may now be feasible to work out international arrangements which would strengthen the security of non-nuclear weapon states. It is important to increase confidence amongst all states that they will not be the object of surprise attack or the victims of miscalculation. A condition of such confidence is information. Reliable information about these matters and some structure of agreed and specific restrictions on use will help to increase confidence that nuclear war can be avoided.

Canada's views about other items on our agenda will be stated at the appropriate time. Our general approach to arms control and disarmament negotiations will, however, be influenced by the following general objectives. First, we will give pre-

ference to initiatives which involve real measures of restraint, reduction or elimination of weapons and armed forces and which, therefore, qualify the actual capabilities of states to wage war.

Second, we believe that the Committee on Disarmament should be more involved in dealing with the main issues. Negotiations on some types of weapons systems are appropriately conducted outside the Committee at least in the initial stages, but as others have pointed out it is also the case that weapons of mass destruction threaten the lives of people everywhere, whether they are citizens of large or small states in any part of the globe. We believe, therefore, that the Committee on Disarmament should establish soon a working group on a Chemical Weapons Treaty, as already proposed by many members of the Committee. It is important that all members of the Committee know what are the main questions in dispute concerning the scope of a Treaty and its verification, if they are to have a hand in resolving these issues and especially if they are to accept fully the obligations which a Treaty will impose on the signatories.

Third, we will continue to attach importance to methods of verification which give confidence that agreements are being observed. They are more likely to do so if impartial and competent international agencies are also involved. The administration of safeguards on peaceful nuclear activities by the IAEA is a good example. We therefore accept the principle of an International Satellite Monitoring Agency under the authority of the United Nations, even though there are formidable financial and political obstacles to the establishment of such an agency, and will support the recommendation of the group of experts studying this subject that a comprehensive report be completed by 1981.

Fourth, we are disposed, in principle, to support other initiatives which help to strengthen the role of this organization as an important source of information and expertise of arrangements for the control of arms. It is unsatisfactory for example, that so much of the information in the public domain on military forces and arms should be published by semi-private institutions and not by the United Nations, despite the high calibre of many of these institutions. We are glad, therefore, that consideration is now being given to proposals that the UN gather more information on conventional weapons, including the transfer of such weapons. Some of this information would be derived from the completion by states of the reporting instrument on military expenditures which has been prepared by the *ad hoc* panel of experts and distributed by the Secretary General. We hope it will receive attention from states in all regions.

Other current UN studies will also help to achieve this purpose. We have in mind especially the studies on disarmament and development on nuclear weapons, and on regional disarmament. We also support the proposal that experts follow up the work already done on confidence-building measures. It has been said that study of a subject is a poor substitute for disarmament. But without impartial elucidation of the facts, wider understanding of the issues and mutual confidence, we may not have any substantial progress on disarmament. We accordingly, in principle, favour the undertaking

of expert studies by the Secretary General which could contribute to progress in any area of arms control and disarmament. We recognize that these studies place a heavy burden on the Centre for Disarmament and that thought needs to be given to the future resources and role of the Centre. A separate research program on disarmament within the framework of UNITAR might help to relieve the strain, and could be financed by voluntary means.

I would like to say a word in conclusion about the efforts my government is making to facilitate the dissemination of information on disarmament. We are financing two research projects on aspects of Canada's economy for the study on disarmament and development. The Canadians serving on the Advisory Board on disarmament studies and on the nuclear weapons study both teach at Canadian universities; their experience will be of benefit to students. We have formed a consultative group of representatives of prominent non-governmental organizations to give advice on matters of education and research, as well as to exchange views on policy questions. There have been a number of meetings and symposia to which the Government has given support. We also intend to promote research into public opinion. It is often assumed that disarmament goals are popular. This may not always be the case. But in any event, our activities here will not be understood unless governments can convert goals into realistic agreements which actually do lessen the dangers of war.