

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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GENERAL AND COMPLETE DISARMAMENT

Statement to the First Committee of the
United Nations General Assembly on
November 9, 1962, by Lieutenant-General
E.L.M. Burns, the Canadian Representative

The most important and urgent task which faces the international community today, as all speakers so far, I think, have agreed, is to reach agreement on disarmament. To put it in stark terms, if civilization is to survive, the nations of the world must disarm.

Recent events show how real and how imminent is the possibility of nuclear war. As the Prime Minister of Canada said on 5 November:

"To all who know how close we were to war and what war today would mean, it is evident that the nuclear arms race must be halted. The logic of the aftermath is grim but clear and permits of no other conclusion than that if the nations of the world do not take effective steps the next crisis may not permit the world to stop short of the abyss of war".

So the crisis which the world has just faced must give a new and a strong impetus towards general and complete disarmament and other measures which will reduce international tensions and sources of conflict.

President Kennedy wrote to Chairman Khrushchov on 28 October:

"I agree with you that we must devote urgent attention to the problem of disarmament as it relates to the whole world and also to critical areas. Perhaps now as we step back from danger, we can together make real progress in this vital field ... We should work hard to see if wide measures of disarmament can be agreed to and put into operation at an early date".

And Chairman Khrushchov, in his letter to President Kennedy of 28 October, emphasized the wish of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics to eliminate the tense international atmosphere and to continue efforts to achieve progress on complete and general disarmament and other matters leading to the relaxation of international tensions.

We think that everyone recognizes that to advance towards general and complete disarmament and to get agreement on measures preliminary to disarmament which could reduce tension and the danger of nuclear war will require intense effort and the most painstaking negotiations. Canada maintains the view that the best place for detailed and comprehensive negotiations on a disarmament programme is the conference of the 18-Nation Committee on Disarmament.

Role of Non-Aligned

The 18-Nation Committee on Disarmament, endorsed by Resolution 1722 (XVI) of 20 December 1961, is, in our view, well suited to the tasks. The conference has several advantages as a negotiating forum. I refer, as so many others have done, to the role of the eight non-aligned countries: Brazil, Burma, Ethiopia, India, Mexico, Nigeria, Sweden and the United Arab Republic. The representative of the United Arab Republic, in his statement in this Committee on 5 November (and we are very much in agreement with what he said) has shown that many changes in both plans were made in response to questions and suggestions of the non-aligned members of the Committee. The presence of these countries in the 18-Nation Committee has made it representative of all major geographical areas of the world. Their active participation in the conference is a constant reminder that disarmament is not the concern of the great powers alone, but of all countries, large and small.

The conference of the 18-Nation Committee has also developed procedures and working methods which are appropriate to its task. It has as its permanent co-chairmen representatives of the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, who have actively co-operated in organizing and forwarding the work of the conference. The conference moved from a rather formal examination of treaty texts in its earlier stages to one of detailed exploration of some of the most difficult problems in the disarmament field. The Canadian Delegation is confident that the 18-Nation Committee, with its improving techniques for comprehensive discussion and negotiations, can, when it returns to its task, succeed not only in bringing the sides closer together but also in achieving a programme for total disarmament.

Collateral Measures Committee

I should like to discuss another important aspect of the 18-Nation Committee -- the work of the Committee of the Whole, sometimes called the Collateral Measures Committee. This Committee, which was set up to deal with measures which are closely related to disarmament and which could come into effect quickly, could help to relieve international tensions and thereby facilitate agreement on general and complete disarmament. The Collateral Measures Committee has two questions on its agenda for immediate consideration: first, measures to prevent the further dissemination of nuclear weapons, and second, reduction of the possibility of war by accident, miscalculation or failure of communications. The recent world crisis has shown us very clearly how vital it is to achieve progress in these two fields.

The first measure on which the Collateral Measures Committee of the 18-Nation Committee on Disarmament should negotiate is, in the view of the Canadian Delegation, to prevent the wider spread of nuclear weapons. Our Delegation would like to associate itself with the eloquent appeal of the representative of Ireland that the nuclear powers take immediate steps to deal with this urgent problem.

A second measure is to put into effect arrangements to reduce the risk of war by accident. The risk of a nuclear holocaust resulting from accident or miscalculation seems far greater than the risk that any nation would deliberately begin a nuclear war.

A third measure which should be given early consideration concerns the prevention of the stationing of weapons of mass destruction in outer space. The Secretary of State for External Affairs for Canada proposed in the 18-Nation Disarmament Committee that a declaration prohibiting such action should be adopted as a matter of priority. International agreement to this effect would be of great value in reducing the fear that the arms race might be extended to this environment. It would also be a first step toward a rule of law in outer space. Moreover, in our view, its adoption would implement and reinforce the two measures I have just mentioned. We welcome the statement by President Kennedy in his letter of 28 October to Chairman Khrushchov that "questions relating to the proliferation of nuclear weapons on earth and in outer space" should be given priority consideration along with related problems.

Nuclear-Free Zones

Another vital question which should be discussed in the Collateral Measures Committee is the establishment of nuclear-free zones in various parts of the world. The importance of this question has been brought to the attention of this Committee by the draft resolution, sponsored by Bolivia, Brazil and Chile, to create a nuclear-free zone in Latin America. The Canadian Delegation believes that the creation of such a zone is primarily a matter for the countries in the region concerned to decide for themselves. But the form of such agreements and, what is very important, the means for verifying that their provisions are being observed could appropriately be considered in the 18-Nation Disarmament Committee as a measure collateral to disarmament.

If we are to profit from the lessons of the Cuban crisis, it is of the highest importance that the 18-Nation Committee resume its work at once and that every effort be made to achieve agreement immediately on the important questions to which I have just referred. The statements of President Kennedy, Chairman Khrushchov and Prime Minister Macmillan, about which I spoke earlier, give new grounds for hope that agreements can be reached in these vital areas.

Taken together, agreements preventing the dissemination of nuclear weapons and the placing of weapons of mass destruction in outer space and measures adopted to avoid the outbreak of war by accident would constitute a significant advance toward a safer and more stable world. International tensions would be immediately reduced, international security would at once be increased, and a notable step forward would be taken towards agreement on general and complete disarmament.

Finally, I should like to discuss briefly some of the questions concerning general and complete disarmament which the 18-Nation Committee had been considering before it recessed. Disarmament questions before the conference fall within three general categories: first, questions on which differences preventing final agreement are relatively small; second, areas in which significant differences still exist between the positions of the two sides; and third, questions which have not as yet been comprehensively explored in the Disarmament Committee.

Conventional Arms and Forces

Under the first heading, the differences in the positions of the two sides concerning conventional armaments and armed forces have been greatly lessened as a result of changes introduced in both plans during the course of negotiations in Geneva. The Canadian Delegation believes that agreement on the question of conventional disarmament has now come within reach. There are also good prospects of overcoming the remaining differences in a closely-related field -- there is a remaining difference regarding the level of armed forces at the end of the first stage, but there is already virtual agreement concerning the level of armed forces at the end of the second stage. In the field of conventional armaments and armed forces, the Canadian Delegation feels that it will also be important for the Disarmament Committee to study the obligations of smaller countries with regard to the levels of conventional armaments and armed forces which they may be permitted to retain during the second and third stages.

In the second category (that is, questions on which there are still substantial differences between the positions of the two sides) one of the key areas where these fairly large differences still exist is that of the reduction and eventual elimination of nuclear-weapons vehicles. The representatives of the United States, the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom have pointed out what these differences are, and the First Committee has been able to judge for itself that there is still a great deal to do before agreement on this point can be achieved. Although this question was explored during the last round of discussions in the Disarmament Committee, further consideration is of course necessary in order to develop a basis for agreement. In the plenary meeting on 25 September of the United Nations General Assembly, the Secretary of State for External Affairs for Canada welcomed the decision of the Soviet Union to modify its proposals for eliminating nuclear-weapons vehicles. The Soviet Union's new proposals introduce a change in principle which may possibly be far reaching, although a detailed examination in the Disarmament Committee will be necessary in order to determine the full

significance and effect of the proposals. The Canadian Delegation must reserve its final views until more is known about what is involved, but we consider that the Soviet Union's proposals may help to remove the block to negotiations which had been created by the opposed positions of the two sides on this question.

Peaceful Settlement Procedures

With regard to the third category (questions not yet sufficiently explored) the 18-Nation Committee can, for example, make a valuable contribution in the field of peace keeping. Both the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics have in their draft treaties recognized the importance of improving the means of keeping the peace, and both draft treaties contain provisions in regard to it.

The joint statement of agreed principles stipulates that disarmament must be accompanied by the establishment of reliable procedures for the peaceful settlement of disputes and by effective arrangements for the maintenance of peace in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Charter.

For all the reasons which I have given, the Canadian Delegation considers it to be of the highest importance for the 18-Nation Committee to resume its work at once and to make the greatest possible effort to achieve progress in the tasks before it.

The very thorough and well-thought-out statements which were made by many members of this Committee on the item whose consideration has just been concluded -- the item on nuclear testing -- have, we think, made it quite clear that the achievement of an end to nuclear testing by means of a well-guaranteed agreement which is satisfactory to all the nuclear powers and which will be observed by them is the first task to be accomplished in the field of disarmament; it is the most important task, for without its accomplishment, we cannot expect any real progress towards general disarmament. We think, therefore, as I have just stated, that it is of the highest importance that the 18-Nation Committee should return to its work in a suitable forum, where it can proceed with dispatch to concentrate on this subject and to reach agreement, as called for in the resolution adopted a few days ago by the General Assembly. We think that the progress which has been achieved in that matter has been largely due to the presence and efforts of the eight non-aligned countries which are participating in the work of the 18-Nation Disarmament Committee.

That is why we lay stress on the Committee of the Whole of the 18-Nation Committee. In the same manner as it achieved the progress which has been reached up to the present, we hope that it will be possible by the date set down in this resolution, which we have passed with a large majority, to report back substantial progress by 10 December. We think it is essential that we lose no time in reassembling and commencing our work.

My Delegation, for these reasons, supports the statement of the representative of the United Arab Republic and of many other delegations which would welcome any initiative that would take note of the 18-Nation Disarmament Committee reports, urge that disarmament negotiations be expeditiously continued in a spirit of compromise, and request that a progress report be submitted to the United Nations General Assembly within a reasonable period of time. Canada hopes that the General Assembly will with one voice support a resolution to this effect.

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