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STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

Message from the Right Honourable
Joe Clark, Secretary of State for
External Affairs, to the Conference on
Disarmament on the occasion of
Canada's assuming the presidency of
the Conference

GENEVA, SWITZERLAND

August 5, 1986

Canada

"Canada feels particularly honoured to be entrusted with the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament during its important closing, report-writing and inter-sessional period. We shall endeavour to fulfill our responsibilities in a manner which fully reflects the high value Canada attaches to the work of the Conference on Disarmament.

In an era when the awesome realities of existing and emerging weapons technologies are a cause for concern to the peoples of all countries and continents, the talks of devising effective agreed arms control and disarmament measures cannot simply be left to those who possess the largest arsenals. The Conference on Disarmament, which is the sole multilateral disarmament negotiating forum, therefore performs an indispensable political and institutional role.

The fact that Canada's presidency occurs during the concluding month of this year's session gives me an opportunity to put forward some reflections on the current international situation in relation to arms control and disarmament, and on the recent work of the Conference on Disarmament in that context.

The attention of the world, understandably, is focussed on the negotiations of the USA and the USSR being conducted, literally, just down the road from the Conference on Disarmament. This attention often takes the form of an impatient clamour for quick results. Such expressions of impatience are politically and humanly understandable. However, we would do well to keep in mind the magnitude and complexity of the agreed objectives which the negotiating parties have set for themselves: no less than "the prevention of an arms race in space and its termination on earth; the limitation and reduction of nuclear arms; and the strengthening of strategic stability, leading ultimately to the complete elimination of nuclear weapons".

It must also be borne in mind that the issues under negotiation involve vital security interests not only of the negotiating parties themselves but of all the members of the Conference on Disarmament and indeed all the peoples of the world. Viewed in this light, while many may have hoped for more rapid progress, there are no grounds for discouragement at this time, there are in fact hopeful signs. Available evidence strongly suggests that both parties are approaching their task with a seriousness and commitment that bodes well for eventual substantive results. It is particularly encouraging when concrete, substantive proposals are put

forward at the negotiating tables, as has recently been the case, rather than first being announced in public. I am sure that all members of the Conference on Disarmament would agree on the importance of conducting ourselves in ways which are supportive of continuing, serious pursuit of those all-important negotiations, while not abdicating our individual and collective responsibility to advance our own work with a sense of real urgency.

The arms control negotiations and discussions of the Conference on Disarmament may understandably attract fewer headlines than the bilaterals, but this should not be taken as an indication of their unimportance. It has been your task to address some of the most politically sensitive and technically difficult issues which governments confront in this area. Just as important, in its role as a sounding board as well as a negotiating forum, the Conference on Disarmament helps in registering emerging issues of concern among political leaders and in defining areas for new negotiated measures. Your work can thus also contribute invaluablely to establishing the tone and texture of the broader arms control and disarmament process. Your current session has been characterized by a most welcome lessening of polemics; there appears to be an increasing trend toward thoughtful, substantive statements, coupled with the submission of practical working papers. I applaud this new spirit, and this new approach.

As for the Conference on Disarmament's priorities, the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction is a central task of the arms control and disarmament process. Your efforts to negotiate a comprehensive ban on chemical weapons therefore is rightly a priority item on your work agenda. Official confirmation by the United Nations Secretary General of repeated chemical weapons use in the Gulf war, which Canada resolutely condemns, as well as reports of efforts by other countries to acquire a chemical weapons capability, must add to our collective sense of urgency to achieve progress on this item. Canada does not favour diverting efforts from the negotiation of a comprehensive ban in order to address the proliferation problem separately. Nevertheless, out of concern for the problem, Canada recently increased to 14 the number of chemicals subject to export controls and, in consultation with several other countries, we are implementing a warning list procedure for a longer list of chemicals.

In the effort to negotiate a comprehensive ban on chemical weapons, there were several welcome developments during the current session of the Conference on Disarmament. The USA Delegation made an important clarification of its thinking on how a treaty might apply to differing social systems. The USSR Delegation made new and positive substantive proposals relating to certain aspects of verification of a treaty, which my Government hopes will soon be supplemented by further proposals dealing with other aspects of verification. The Canadian Government hopes also that the important recent UK initiative will facilitate a convergency of views on the sensitive and vital issue of challenge inspection. Under energetic and notably competent chairmanship, the Ad Hoc Committee has made further progress toward resolving some of the more difficult technical issues. The Canadian Delegation submitted two working papers as a contribution to the collective effort. The holding by the Netherlands of a workshop relating to verification of non-production, as well as the broad attendance at that workshop, was gratifying and encouraging. It is important that the momentum thus generated be maintained, including through inter-sessional work to the extent practicable.

The issue of a ban on nuclear tests has properly continued to occupy a prominent place in the CD agenda. The negotiation of a comprehensive nuclear test ban remains a fundamental objective of the Canadian Government. We were therefore disappointed at the failure to agree on a mandate for a subsidiary body on this item, which would have permitted practical work in preparing the ground for the negotiation of such a ban. This session, nevertheless, was not without positive developments. We have noted carefully, and welcome, the recent Soviet statement indicating a forthcoming approach on technical and institutional matters relating to the establishment and operation of a global seismic monitoring network. We are also pleased that the USSR and the USA are holding expert level discussions on nuclear test issues. Australia's call for a decision to establish an international seismic network is wholly consistent with Canada's longstanding concern to develop means for reliably verifying a test ban. The Conference on Disarmament is aware that we are upgrading a seismic array in our own northern territory and have commissioned other related research, and that we will be conducting a technical workshop in Ottawa this autumn, at which we hope CD members will be widely represented. In the Canadian view, a gradual incremental step-by-step approach will be required if a comprehensive test ban is to become a reality. We intend to pursue vigourously our efforts to this end in the Conference on Disarmament and in other forums.

The prevention of an arms race in outer space is a high priority for Canada, and this CD agenda item warrants special efforts and attention. As was the case last year, Canada submitted a substantive working paper designed to facilitate consideration of existing relevant international law and the possible need for it to be supplemented by additional negotiated measures. We have also commissioned extensive research into the potential for using existing technology for purposes of space-based verification. We intend in the future to make the results of this research more widely available.

It was a matter of disappointment that a mandate for a subsidiary body on the outer space item was agreed only half way through the 1986 session. As a result, for a second consecutive year, only half of the session's time could be devoted to substantive deliberations. Once the mandate was agreed, the ensuing discussion was on the whole characterized by an impressive sobriety and thoughtfulness. In the Canadian view, the existing mandate is demonstrating its usefulness.

The Conference on Disarmament is also engaged in negotiation aimed at banning radiological weapons, which fortunately are not yet known to exist. My Government recognizes that following the tragic accident at Chernobyl, there are heightened concerns about the potential consequences of attacks on peaceful nuclear facilities. My Government hopes that there can be early agreement on how this issue can most effectively be addressed, so as to avoid prolonged further delay in concluding a radiological weapons ban.

Unfortunately, concrete achievements at the Conference on Disarmament in recent years have been scarce. This may be an indicator not so much of failure as of limits. Delegations at the Conference can achieve no more than what their respective instructions, reflective of perceived national interest and political will, allow. Nevertheless, Canada would join with others in urging a searching re-examination of the methods and procedures whereby the Conference on Disarmament conducts its operations. It would be regrettable, possibly tragic, if opportunities for progress were missed due to institutional inefficiencies or failings.

In conclusion, I am confident Ambassador Beesley can count on the support and cooperation of all Delegations in bringing this year's Conference on Disarmament session efficaciously to its conclusion".