

1973-20

Statement by Mr. J.A. Beesley
Representative of Canada to the Seabed Committee
Made in Plenary on July 23, 1973.

Mr. Chairman,

It is with great regret that my delegation feels compelled to intervene this morning to express the serious concern of the Canadian Government over the continuance of nuclear weapons atmospheric tests. We have no doubts as to the relevance of that issue to the work of this committee. We have no doubts as to the comprehensiveness of our mandate concerning the preservation of the marine environment. We have no doubts as to the propriety of the committee giving consideration to this question.

Indeed, we know of no issue facing the Law of the Sea Conference of greater importance than the imperative need to develop legal rules for the preservation of the marine environment, referred to so eloquently a few moments ago by the distinguished representative of Chile. All of our work on the many intricate, legal, political, social and economic issues which we are trying so hard to resolve will prove of little benefit if we are unable to arrest the process of the degradation by man of this environment upon which man depends so much.

Mr. Chairman, it was pointed out by the U.N. Scientific Committee on the effects of radiation (UNSCEAR) in 1969 that "debris from nuclear tests in the atmosphere is still the major radioactive contaminant of the environment." This finding is confirmed by the 1972 UNSCEAR report.

In a statement on July 3, 1973 by the Canadian representative at the 609th Plenary Meeting of the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament, Ambassador Barton spoke for the Canadian Government when he said:

"Nuclear weapons tests cannot be considered in isolation, because their effects are cumulative. Each atmospheric test must be seen in the light of the previous buildup of persistent radioactivity. Each new test, however small, further slows the decline of environmental radioactivity away from the abnormally high levels which were reached in the early 1960's. For these reasons, it is no longer defensible - if indeed it ever was - for any nuclear power to plead that its atmospheric tests are so small and infrequent that they present no identifiable danger to human health or to the environment. Any increase in exposure of the world's peoples to radiation above natural background levels will cause an increased danger to human life and health. It follows that no increase in radiation exposure to the world's population should be permitted unless it can be demonstrated that there is a corresponding benefit to mankind, such as is produced by

nuclear power reactors or the use of radiation for medical purposes. My Delegation does not see how such benefits to mankind could arise from nuclear weapons tests - by whatever state - and consequently fails to accept that there can be justification for atmospheric testing by any state."

The Canadian representative went on to say:

"These are the reasons why Canada is most concerned that, despite the conclusion of the partial test ban ten years ago, nuclear weapons testing continues in the atmosphere. The vast majority of states share this concern, as shown by the numerous resolutions adopted by the United Nations General Assembly and other international bodies protesting the continuation of these tests. In addition, the International Court of Justice, which has been seized of the atmospheric nuclear testing issue, has directed as an interim measure that the nuclear powers which are party to the dispute should avoid nuclear tests causing the deposit of radioactive fall-out on the territory of the complainant states. My Delegation accordingly considers it necessary, as we give thought to the implementation of the partial test ban treaty, to call once again on the nuclear powers which have been carrying out tests in the atmosphere to halt this kind of testing in particular, and to associate themselves with the Treaty."

Mr. Chairman, it is not the purpose of my intervention this morning to single out any country on this issue. Canada has a long-standing and consistent position of opposition to all nuclear testing. We protest every nuclear test whether atmospheric or underground. We have strongly supported every condemnation of such tests by the U.N., by the Stockholm Environmental Conference and by this committee. We worked as hard as any country to achieve agreement on the Partial Test Ban Treaty. We greatly regret that ten years after the conclusion of that treaty we have not been able to reach agreement on a total ban of all nuclear tests. We regret even more that ten years after the conclusion of that treaty some states not parties to the treaty still consider it necessary to carry out nuclear tests in the atmosphere.

My Delegation joins with those others who have expressed their profound regret at this most recent atmospheric test and the hope and plea that states making such tests will heed the wishes of the international community on this issue of concern to humanity as a whole.