

Intervention in First Committee by
H.E. J. Alan Beesley, Ambassador for Disarmament

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Mr. Chairman,

I have the honour today to introduce draft resolution L.48 on the prohibition on the production of fissionable materials for weapons purposes, which has been co-sponsored by Australia, Austria, Bahamas, Canada, Denmark, Greece, Indonesia, Ireland, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Philippines, Singapore and Sweden.

Like its predecessors 33/91H, 34/87D, 35/15H and 36/97G, this resolution is procedural in nature: it requests the Committee on Disarmament to consider at an appropriate time the question of adequately verified cessation and prohibition of the production of fissionable material for nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices, and to keep the General Assembly informed of progress on this matter. The resolution is based upon the view -- which has attained wide acceptance in the international community -- that such a "freeze" of production of fissionable material for weapons purposes can make a significant contribution to disarmament, complementing and reinforcing verifiable agreements which limit and prohibit nuclear weapons themselves. Therefore, Mr. Chairman, I commend this resolution to the Committee with confidence that it will attain wide support from the Membership.

Mr. Chairman, I would also like to draw attention to draft resolution L.44, a procedural resolution on negotiations in the Committee on Disarmament toward conclusion of a Chemical Weapons Convention. Canada is one of the co-sponsors of this resolution, which will be introduced in due course by Poland. Along with other co-sponsors, we hope that many delegations will associate themselves with this resolution, and that it will be adopted by consensus, particularly given the critical stage that has been reached in negotiations on this matter in the Committee on Disarmament.

Mr. Chairman, I have listened with attention to the thoughtful and thought-provoking statement by the distinguished delegate of the Netherlands. Quite apart from the substantive aspects of his statement, with much of which the Canadian Delegation agrees, he has raised some fundamental questions concerning our procedure in this Committee.

We are all aware that the United Nations is under attack from certain quarters and that its effectiveness has been challenged by an even broader range of opinion. At the same time we are witnessing an astounding and encouraging upsurge of public interest in and concern over the problems of arms control and disarmament, particularly issues concerning nuclear arms.

It has just been pointed out by the Dutch representative that on vital questions relating to nuclear weapons and other arms control issues, the General Assembly

speaks with more than one voice -- sometimes contradictory voices -- thereby lessening its impact to a corresponding degree. We all know it is more effective to proceed by consensus. The increase in influence is not merely arithmetic: it is exponential.

We are all aware also that certain law-making and other important conferences proceed by consensus. We have heard pleas in this Committee that we streamline our procedures and devise more effective methods of work.

I wonder what would be the effect of adopting rules for this Committee, irrespective of how other committees work, whereby we would agree to work by consensus and proceed to vote only when it is determined that all efforts at consensus have been exhausted. Would such an approach bring the First Committee to a grinding halt, or would it maximize pressure for realism and focus our attention on the need and expectations for concrete action? Would such a proposal make us nervous or be met with relief? Surely we can be certain on one point: namely that world opinion would welcome it.

I am not so naive as to advance such an idea at this stage as a formal proposal. I do, however, suggest that we consider the implications of such a procedure in comparison to our present methods of work.

There is clearly a need to consider ways and means in which we might maximize our effectiveness. I say this, Mr. Chairman, in the light of the views I have previously expressed complimenting you and the other members of the Bureau on the way you have conducted our proceedings. Obviously the fault, if there is fault, is shared by all of us. Equally clearly the benefit of more effective procedures would be a source of satisfaction to us all, and would give concrete evidence of our desire to respond to world public opinion.

Mr. Chairman, in expressing these views I feel certain that I am giving voice to concerns widely shared in this Committee and outside it.

Thank you.