

Statement by Ambassador J. Alan Beesley
Head of the Canadian Delegation to the
United Nations Disarmament Commission

New York, May 9, 1984

Mr. Chairman,

I wish first to congratulate you on your election as Chairman of the Disarmament Commission. In accepting this position, you have assumed a very heavy responsibility. The challenges facing you are formidable. May I compliment you on the skill and wisdom you have shown in persuading us all to accept an element of discipline in our proceedings, which is clearly essential. I can assure you of my delegation's full co-operation.

In your opening statement to the Disarmament Commission on May 7, you made a number of points which my delegation found particularly relevant and which set the right tone for our discussions. As you pointed out, there is no dearth of proposals or machinery to deal with the question of arms control and disarmament. What is lacking is political commitment. You were correct in drawing attention to the unfortunate state of East-West relations as one of the root causes of the lack of progress which we have been witnessing lately. This has been a serious preoccupation of the Canadian Government.

The Arms Race

In the fall of 1983 the Prime Minister of Canada drew attention to three potentially dangerous trends - namely the resort to force to settle disputes, the risk of the proliferation of nuclear weapons and the worsening state of East-West relations. At the same time, he announced the intention of the Government of Canada to devote its full

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political resources to reducing the threat of war. He resolved to try to inject high level political energy into East-West relations in order to reverse the flow of events. Over a three-month period Canada's Prime Minister visited 16 countries and the United Nations in furtherance of this peace mission. The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in New Delhi expressed support for his initiative. It is clear from his efforts that areas of common interest are beginning to emerge. Mr. Chairman, instead of reading aloud the ten principles of a common bond between East and West which the Prime Minister enunciated in the Canadian House of Commons on February 9 as having emerged from his discussions, I shall be glad simply to submit them as an Annex to this statement for inclusion in the records, in order to save the Commission's time.

I should like to emphasize also the importance in this context of the Declaration of Brussels of December 9, 1983. In that Declaration, my Government joined its allies in urging the countries of the Warsaw Pact to "seize the opportunities we offer for a balanced and constructive relationship and for genuine détente".

There is a good reason for this. As Prime Minister Trudeau pointed out in a speech on May 2: "In matters nuclear, we are learning that the West's security is the East's security, that we depend on each other for our survival. We are learning that old attitudes do not go with new technology,

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that notions of fighting and prevailing in a nuclear war are very dangerous delusions. But we have not yet found a sure means of bridging the gap between new understanding and age-old instinct. And so we risk the ultimate Darwinian test."

An increase in mutual security is the only sound basis for effective arms control and disarmament as the Canadian Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for External Affairs, Allan MacEachen, has stated in what is now the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva. He pointed out that attempts by one side to make gains at the expense of the security of the other ultimately will not work; action by one side which is perceived by the other to be threatening creates or widens a gulf of suspicion and produces reaction which can poison the political relationship. As Mr. MacEachen noted, arms control negotiations offer an escape from this danger only if the parties accept as their fundamental objective increased mutual security rather than unilateral advantage.

Mr. MacEachen also emphasized that an attempt by any power to develop a policy which assumes that nuclear war can be winnable contributes to mutual insecurity.

My delegation has noted the interest expressed yesterday by the Warsaw Pact in consultations on a treaty on the renunciation of force. At the Bonn Summit in 1982, Canada and its allies pledged that their weapons would never be used except in response to attack. Last December this pledge was renewed in the Brussels Declaration. We shall, of course,

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give careful study to the Warsaw Pact proposal. Our guideline in assessing it will be whether it could lead to a reduction in the current level of East-West tension and to the successful negotiation of meaningful and verifiable arms control agreements.

It is against this background that my delegation approaches the items on our agenda. Some of these have been with us for a considerable time. One is a new item which my delegation believes deserves very serious attention, namely, the relationship between disarmament and development.

As regards Items 4(a) and 4(b) on the various aspects of the arms race we, of course, recognize the need to focus on the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament, which is the overriding issue of the day. The risks to human survival in a nuclear war are frightening. I would remind members, however, that conventional arms and disarmament are also included in this item. In mentioning this, I do not wish in any way to imply the downplaying of the seriousness or importance of the problem of nuclear armaments. My reference to this point does, however, reflect my delegation's concern that approximately 80% of the world's spending on arms is directed to conventional arms and that this expenditure involves not only the superpowers but other countries, both developed and developing.

Why governments spend funds, to the extent they do, on arms is a fundamental question which has to be addressed. It is at the heart of all arms control and disarmament negotiations.

The answer usually given is their search for security. In many, - possibly most - cases, that may be true; but the question needs more study since there is ample evidence of arms expenditure in excess of normal requirements for security - and scant evidence that arms races contribute to the security of anyone.

Disarmament and Development

The needs of the developing countries are all too urgent and pressing to require emphasis here. The efforts of Member States of the United Nations have long been directed at trying to meet some of those needs. Under Item 8 on the relationship between disarmament and development which will be discussed in Working Group IV, we shall have an opportunity to examine how disarmament might offer a way to make a substantial contribution to this universally desired goal.

As pointed out by the distinguished representative of Sweden yesterday, if even a fraction of the arms expenditures of the superpowers or the militarily important powers were to be diverted to meeting the needs of the developing countries, great prospects for development could open up. If the expenditures on arms by the developing countries themselves could be reduced, a substantial amount would also be released for development purposes.

The major military powers (and, indeed, others) are not likely to agree to disarm simply to divert funds for development, particularly international development. Equally pressing reasons for disarming have not persuaded them to do so up to now, in the face of their perception of overriding security concerns. *.../6*

In discussing the disarmament/development relationship, attention must focus on the problems involved in diverting, for development purposes, resources now being devoted to arms by both the developing and developed countries. It is not enough simply to try to find additional funds for development. If that were the case - and proposals have been made to that effect - the disarmament aspect of the discussion would become irrelevant and the objective would become simply a matter of raising funds and would be held elsewhere in a purely development context. Our two-fold objective was clearly outlined for us in United Nations resolution 38/71B which based its call for action not only on development needs but on the arms build-up and the resulting risks for world peace and security. My delegation urges members not to lose sight of this when we begin our in-depth discussion in Working Group IV.

Reduction of Military Budgets

In our view, priority should be given to establishing the actual burden of arms. We have already drawn attention to the various budgetary systems employed by states functioning under different social systems and the consequential need to develop a common data base upon which equitable reductions could be made and verified. The discussions in Working Group I of Item 5 on the Reduction of Military Budgets will be relevant in this respect. Unfortunately United Nations experience with

the universal reporting instrument which would allow military budgets to be measured, compared and eventually reduced with some assurance of compliance shows that very few countries - some Western and non-aligned - are ready to provide this essential information. As a consequence, there is a question in the minds of some as to whether this item should be maintained on our agenda. For our part, we have not made such a judgement as yet, but we will bear this factor in mind in participating actively and constructively in Working Group I.

Confidence-Building Measures

In the days ahead we shall, under Item 7, be concentrating on ways of developing trust between states that might facilitate arms control agreements. The elaboration of confidence-building measures which are militarily significant, politically binding and verifiable and thus go beyond a merely declaratory approach would be a major contribution to the negotiating process. We hope that this year some agreed guidelines may emerge from our discussion of this item in Working Group III.

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South Africa

Before concluding, I wish to refer to Item 6 on the question of South Africa's nuclear capability. My Government has, as you know, worked hard for many years to strengthen the non-proliferation regime based on the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Indeed, this forms an important element of the Prime Minister's recent initiative. We continue to monitor South Africa's nuclear status very carefully in view of its potential capability to develop nuclear weapons. We have strongly urge