

*Frank Buckley's Speech
4 April 1985*

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Mr. BEESELEY (Canada): Mr. President, quite clearly, in the light of the relatively non-controversial statement I had intended to deliver, I am speaking at a rather bad time. But, nonetheless, I do congratulate you personally on your assumption of the presidency and I warmly welcome the new Secretary-General of the Conference, Ambassador Komatina, because I have not done so formally before this time. I should also like to thank the preceding Presidents, Ambassador Taylhardat and Ambassador Lowitz, for having skilfully directed the work of our Conference; and I do not use those words in the usual fashion, I mean them most sincerely. It is a particular pleasure, Mr. President, for me to be speaking today under your presidency because we have been friends and colleagues of very long standing, and I hope I may say even comrades in arms control, and it is a second and additional pleasure that you represent a country with which Canada has had such close and friendly relations.

On an issue I had not intended to touch on, I think I understand the sincerity of the statement we have heard and the reference to the victory over Nazism. This was a struggle in which my country participated from the outset, and I hope my motives will not be misunderstood if I say that we believed that we entered that conflict by a deliberately independent decision of the Canadian Government in the very first few days of that conflict to defend the territorial integrity and political independence of a country, Poland itself; and I know that Ambassador Turbanski will not misunderstand my motives in saying that, so I think it may be relevant to recall past wars in determining why we should be attempting to avoid them through our efforts.

I should also mention that obviously no country can even understand or comprehend the losses suffered by the USSR, which were so great, so much greater than those of others; but it would be wrong to assure that we are all unaware of the kind of suffering that that war could create. Many Canadian families, including my own, lost heavily. I had a brother wounded, a brother killed, my sister in the services, and I was to be next when the war ended, thank God; so I say that, not in reply to Ambassador Issraelyan, but to associate myself with him in his total rejection of that kind of war or any other.

The new Canadian Government elected last September has placed a high priority on arms control and disarmament. In a series of public statements, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney has made it clear that "there is no cause more urgent or more necessary ... than to contribute to the reduction of the threat of war and to further the cause of peace". He pointed out what no one in this Conference needs to know that progress will be "a slow and arduous process", but emphasized that "there can be no let-up in our efforts to reduce the threat of war. No matter how frustrating or difficult, negotiations must be pursued".

Later, at a meeting between Prime Minister Mulroney and President Reagan in Quebec City on 12 March, the two leaders said: "We seek a more stable world, with greatly reduced levels of nuclear arms". In light of the statement we have just heard on the prevention of nuclear war, it may be relevant to note that they agreed that "significant, equitable, durable and verifiable arms control measures can play a role in strengthening strategic stability, maintaining our security at a lower level of force and armament, and reducing the risk of war -- both nuclear and conventional." But they also affirmed their determination, and this has direct relevance to our work, to "work to gain agreement on effective measures in the international negotiations in Vienna, Geneva and Stockholm" and in the process to bring about significant arms reduction between East and West.

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Similarly, in a speech at the thirty-ninth session of the United Nations General Assembly, the Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Right Honourable Joe Clark, stated that: "Canada, for its part, is determined to continue to play a leading role in the search for peace and disarmament.", and we genuinely believe that, in spite of references to Western States that might suggest something different. More specifically, he added: "We shall seek, through concrete and realistic steps, progress toward a comprehensive test ban treaty. We shall encourage super-Power and multilateral discussion on all outer space weapons, and shall commission further studies on how a space weapons ban might be verified. We shall work for the success of next year's Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference" a point to which I shall return, "in order to prevent the horizontal proliferation of nuclear weapons." He added: "We shall continue to press for a verifiable convention prohibiting the development, production, stockpiling and use of chemical weapons.", and this is the policy framework within which the Canadian delegation approaches this Conference. We have firm instructions to do everything that will make it possible for the Conference on Disarmament to get on with its substantive work, and cease haggling over procedural issues. That is also a point to which I shall return.

The fundamental priorities of the Canadian Government in arms control and disarmament outside this Conference are: to contribute to progress in the nuclear arms talks between the United States and the Soviet Union; and to ensure the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Within the Conference on Disarmament, our major priorities are: a comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty; preventing an arms race in outer space; and the early conclusion of a convention on chemical weapons.

While pursuing these objectives, the Canadian Government is committed also to moving forward on other arms control subjects in the Conference on Disarmament, including in particular: the prevention of nuclear war; and a treaty on radiological weapons.

Many representatives who have spoken before me during the session, and I am speaking late, have made one or more of the following three points: they have stressed the importance of the Conference on Disarmament as the only existing multilateral negotiating forum on disarmament; they have noted with regret that the Conference on Disarmament and its predecessor, the Committee on Disarmament, have not achieved a single agreement in six years, going on seven, and that the negotiating process needs to be invigorated; a point raised this morning by the distinguished representative of the USSR, my friend and colleague, Ambassador Issraelyan; and they have expressed the hope that the bilateral talks between the United States of America and the USSR would give new life to the Conference on Disarmament.

No one denies that all delegations to this Conference are extremely busy. Our schedule of meetings is so intensive that it is difficult for many delegates to attend them all. But how much progress are we making? In other statements in the past, I have emphasized as others have that the mere process is, of itself, important, but I have also said that we must not confuse process with progress.

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If the Conference process is as important as we say it is, and this was asked again this morning, why are we still mired in procedural discussions on most issues, at the expense of substantive work directed towards achieving the results we, and those we represent, should expect from this forum? Again, in previous statements, I have expressed the view that the key is to concentrate first on determining the common ground on difficult issues, and then seek to expand it, rather than concentrate so much on the issues which divide us, as we so often do. It may be recalled that in an extempore statement in plenary on 3 July 1984 I quoted from no less an authority than Grotius, the father of international law, and precisely this point: he gave this advice, according to a recently discovered seventeenth century document: "instead of talking about things that separate us we should concentrate on what binds us together." We continue to think that this is good advice. I recognize of course that the common ground very often comprises a lowest common denominator, but even so, if it permits forward movement in our work we should accept it, but as a first step on a long road towards achieving our ultimate common goal.

Now, many have expressed the hope that the United States-USSR bilateral negotiations would have a positive spill-over effect in this multilateral forum -- that they might infuse this forum with new life. Until last week, that had not happened on most issues.

However, we did finally achieve an important breakthrough, in agreeing on 29 March on a mandate on outer space, after two years of discussion. I should like to refer to that event, not only because of its intrinsic importance, but because it could serve as an example for us on other issues.

Focusing on outer space, the mandate proposed may not include all that everyone here would wish, and I am sure that is the case; it may even be regarded by some as the least common denominator. Nevertheless, it not only permits but calls for substantive action from this Conference. As pointed out in my statement on 29 March, it is a realistic mandate in that it is exploratory at this stage, but it nevertheless should not be regarded as a narrow or restrictive one as it provides the basis for immediate concrete work. If this Conference is to play a positive role in moving forward on the sensitive and important issue of outer space, surely the time has come to begin serious work on the basis of this agreed mandate.

As pointed out in my statement on 29 March, the consensus on the outer space mandate reflects great credit on all the members of the Conference on Disarmament, indeed, on the Conference itself, but particularly on the major space Powers. I believe we have succeeded in resolving this important procedural question, which had been outstanding for so long, because of a conscious attempt to determine the area of existing common ground, and to respond flexibly in doing so with a view to expanding it as we go along.

As a first step, Canada already has in train a study on relevant aspects of international law and existing treaties and agreements applicable to outer space. This is a subject which should, in our view, be addressed immediately under the proposed mandate. We are fully prepared to share the results of our research, and we hope that our study might help to get the work of the Conference on Disarmament started quickly.

On the vital issue of a nuclear test ban, Canada advocated the re-establishment of a subsidiary body to expedite and crystallize efforts to resolve the problems relating to the practical aspects of verification.

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This, as we see it, is a first step towards accelerating progress toward a treaty. Even in the absence of an agreed mandate, it is important to note that the international seismic-data exchange exercise last fall is an example of an undramatic event which, when results are analysed, can contribute to real progress towards a nuclear test ban treaty. This experiment was conducted with a genuine spirit of co-operation among more than 50 countries. It produced a considerable amount of useful information which will allow the seismic group to further refine the seismic data exchange procedures described in its earlier reports to the Conference on Disarmament. The seismic group began its assessment of this experiment last week and has identified a significant amount of work yet to be done to complete the evaluation. This work and that on other issues of verification and compliance must, we suggest, continue, whatever the procedural decisions we make.

At the United Nations General Assembly we supported -- and indeed co-sponsored -- a resolution urging the Conference on Disarmament to take steps for the establishment as soon as possible of an international seismic monitoring network to monitor nuclear explosions and to determine the capabilities of such a network for monitoring compliance with a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty. Such a proposal goes to the heart of the disagreement we know of, as to whether a test ban could be verified. The resolution also urged the Conference on Disarmament to initiate detailed investigation of other measures to monitor and verify compliance with such a treaty, including an international network to monitor atmospheric radioactivity.

Our expectation is that some further progress on these important questions is possible at this very session. However, the problem of a nuclear test ban will not be solved if we simply stop there. For Canada, the achievement of a comprehensive test-ban treaty remains a fundamental Canadian objective. That is why the General Assembly resolution which we co-sponsored urged the Conference on Disarmament to re-establish at the beginning of its 1985 session an ad hoc committee to resume immediately its substantive work relating to a comprehensive test ban, -- but including now the issue of scope as well as those of verification and compliance, -- with a view to negotiation of a treaty. Thus the draft mandate for an ad hoc subsidiary body on a nuclear test ban as proposed by Canada and other Western delegations (CD/521) would significantly widen the nuclear test ban mandates already agreed to in 1982 and 1983, by including the issue of scope. Here too, an attempt has been made, however modestly, to expand the area of common ground, and this is an example of an issue on which we can build and expand upon what was already accepted earlier, through a series of incremental realistic steps. Now, some may argue that even such an expanded mandate is unacceptable because it represents the lowest common denominator or even less. But we have to start somewhere, we do operate on the basis of consensus, if we are to progress toward a comprehensive test ban. I wonder, had we done so last year, whether we might now be a little closer to our objective of a total test ban.

Nearly a year ago in this chamber, I expressed Canada's support for a step-by-step approach to a nuclear test ban, both on procedure and substance: but let us first agree on a mandate. We should then seek to establish a common understanding on one crucial area, which is for many a pre-condition to further progress, namely the effectiveness of existing means of verifying an agreement. We are aware, for instance, that views differ on whether existing technology is adequate to detect

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nuclear testing, and setting up an ad hoc committee would help us to determine whether or not this is the case. Then we can move on to the next agreed priority area. Clearly, negotiations must be our objective -- certainly that is the Canadian position -- but the necessary foundation for concrete negotiations can and should first be laid. This is the process we have followed in our work on chemical weapons with some measure of success. It is also the process we have now agreed to which I hope we follow, on outer space. On this issue, that process may require flexibility from some delegations, but if it could be accepted as the minimal common ground, we can begin work immediately.

Turning to chemical weapons, it is only appropriate that I dwell for a few moments on that subject, since this is the period set aside in the first part of the 1985 session specifically for discussion in plenary of this issue.

The Ad Hoc Committee on Chemical Weapons has done intensive work during the 1984 session under the very able chairmanship of Ambassador Rolf Ekéus and has not only clarified many points but focused attention on the basic framework of a future agreement, and I would like to express my personal gratitude to him, as well as that of my Government.

Ambassador Turbanski is already showing our wisdom in selecting him as successor to Ambassador Ekéus. He has lost no time in setting the course of the chemical weapons negotiations for the 1985 session. As a result, I would hope that, by making full use of our time, we might at least come close to completing our work during the 1985 session. It is a pretty tall order, I realize. Work in the three working groups is, however, progressing rather slowly, and there seems to be a worrisome tendency, which I do not level at any one group or any one delegation, to utilize the time in restating old positions and covering old ground. What we think that we must strive to do is to pinpoint those issues on which we agree and then work on those key issues which remain to be resolved, rather than continue to devote attention to somewhat less important issues in ever greater detail. We must in other words avoid creating inflexibility by our own working methods.

Clearly, we are at a stage in the negotiations where we must address certain critical issues related to verification. To delegations opposed to a discussion of the conceptual aspects of verification in isolation from concrete issues, let me say that we see too little indication of much willingness to come to grips by one means or another with the essential requirement of verification. For example, agreement must be found on procedures for the inspection of stockpile and production sites upon declaration at entry into force of the convention, which implies agreement on the principle of such inspection. How else can we be assured that the production sites are sealed and no longer active until they are destroyed? While the concept of continuous inspection during the destruction of existing chemical weapons has been generally accepted, similar agreement has eluded us on monitoring the destruction of the means of production. The issue of challenge verification must be addressed objectively, and I have listened with great interest to the important statement just delivered by the distinguished representative of the USSR which touched on that very issue. I think that what are needed are proposals, and we know that the United States delegation has taken the initiative in putting forward proposals outlining its views in detail on these issues. Without directing criticism at other delegations, we do

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think that those who see matters differently should be prepared to table their own proposals on possible alternative approaches, updated proposals from earlier ones if necessary, so that the process of real negotiation may move forward. The first step obviously is to address the issues, and this does not seem to be occurring; but the second, I would hope, would be the tabling of relevant proposals or counter-proposals, bearing in mind the present state of negotiations.

On a separate and seemingly procedural matter, Ambassador Turbancki, as directed in the report of last year's ad hoc committee on chemical weapons, has already held consultations on the subject of the extension of work into the autumn and even possibly the early part of 1986. My delegation is prepared to agree to increase the time devoted to this subject during the year, as we have been urged to do in United Nations General Assembly resolution 39/65C. In spite of the obvious difficulties, and they are really considerable for many delegations, we would be prepared to carry on work on the convention anytime between the regular sessions of the Conference on Disarmament. Indeed how can we do less when reports continue to appear of the actual use of chemical weapons? I am going to personalize for a moment again, to say that I know something about the effects of chemical weapons because my own father suffered from them in the First World War: so many of us come to this Conference with personal convictions as well as national positions. It seems to me that the renewed use of these dreadful weapons long after we all believed they had been outlawed adds ever-increasing urgency to our work.

I have emphasized in the past our concerns about the danger of proliferation of chemical weapons, and have pointed out that this proliferation would inevitably exacerbate regional tensions and lead to new dimensions in regional arms competition. This proliferation is now fact and no longer mere theory.

Any war produces horrible results, but the use of chemical weapons greatly heightens the human suffering entailed. It represents a totally unacceptable escalation of any conflict. It is moreover, as I have just pointed out, a violation of international law in the form of the 1925 Geneva Protocol. For this reason, Canada, in agreement with many other countries, has imposed controls on the export of certain chemicals which could be useful in the production of highly toxic chemical warfare agents. We recognize that this is far from adequate in closing off the many routes to production of all of the known chemical warfare agents. That overriding goal can only be achieved through a verifiable ban on all chemical weapons.

It is important, of course, to bear in mind that work on a prohibition of use in this forum and in the context of a future chemical weapons convention does not in any way detract from the status or obligations of the 1925 Geneva Protocol. Last year when I acted in a personal capacity as friend of the Chairman, Rolf Ekéus, on the prohibition of use issue, this was a point often made to me by other delegations privately as well as during the informal discussions at which I presided. At the same time, it is essential to preserve the full force and effect of the Geneva Protocol by precise formulations which take into account the legitimate apprehensions of delegations about the possible loopholes created by imprecise language.

If I may, I would like to draw attention to one other aspect of the informal discussions which I have just mentioned. As we are all aware, the 1985 report of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Chemical Weapons (CD/416) provides an outline of various

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But, the prevention of nuclear war requires all States to do their utmost to ensure that war is no longer viewed as an instrument for settling international disputes. As I have pointed out the Charter of the United Nations prohibits the use and the threat of the use of force. I have listened with interest to the important statement of the distinguished representative of India, who shares our concern about the dangers that nuclear arms present: the dangers, indeed, of the extinguishing of the human race. We continue to believe that the prevention of nuclear war must be a major priority of arms control and disarmament measures, but we continue also to believe that it cannot and should not be considered in isolation for reasons that I will come back to. At the United Nations General Assembly, Canada joined with other delegations in outlining some of the measures that we believe might serve the broader purpose of preventing war in the nuclear age. We think these ideas merit serious consideration and would like to pursue them further in this chamber, hear reactions from other delegations, listen to their views, and respond to them. My delegation would like the Conference on Disarmament to establish an appropriate framework during the course of this session so that we may have a more in-depth consideration of this subject.

But even more fundamental, whatever organizational framework is adopted, it must, in our view, be clearly understood and agreed that any country or group of countries at the Conference on Disarmament should be completely free to raise or discuss under this agenda item any issue it considers relevant. For example, we pose no objection to a discussion of nuclear deterrence; equally so, I do not see how we could exclude a discussion of conventional warfare, precisely because of the danger, but surely no one would deny that conventional warfare could trigger the holocaust of nuclear warfare. Moreover, if nuclear deterrence or conventional deterrence are seen in the context of self-defence, as suggested by the distinguished representative of India, in the view of other countries this might further illuminate our discussion. Let us at least discuss and ponder it. In the meantime, we think we would be well advised to recall that all five major Powers possess nuclear weapons, and even India is listed by Sweden each year amongst the States that did conduct a nuclear explosion. Now, we do not for a moment question India's peaceful intentions concerning its own explosive device. We do question whether the intentions of others should be raised in this forum. We are aware that there is no scientific or technical basis for differentiating between peaceful and non-peaceful explosions -- nonetheless, we do not question the motives of India. It follows, however, that we do not look kindly upon having our motives questioned by broad phrases such as "Western Countries", "Western Group", etc. In so far as Canada is concerned, whatever our defence arrangements may be, we had the technology at the end of the Second World War and we renounced it, and we opted to join the Non-Proliferation Treaty. That is a subject I am prepared to return to, but I do not think it appropriate.

Now if we cannot agree on this relatively modest area of common ground, namely, that we are each free to discuss any issue at the beginning of the process, then I really do not hold much hope for the future of this item, in spite of its potential importance.

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As a contribution to this process, Canada lends its support to the general approach outlined in the Federal Republic of Germany's Working Paper CD/573, not as a final or exclusive list of issues to be discussed, not as a demand that everyone else accept the programme approach, but rather as indicative of the kind of approach we could consider. It comprises, as we see it, a helpful contribution to our deliberations, as stated by Ambassador Wegener, the suggested list remains open for modification and amendment. If other delegations or groups of delegations can adopt similar or complementary or even divergent approaches, then we could collectively lay the basis for a constructive dialogue, without necessarily focusing on the kind of detailed approach criticized by the distinguished representative of India. If we were to approach our work in that fashion I think we could look forward to some serious action. In any event, we think it possible for us to do so and we think the time has come to get on with it.

On radiological weapons: since 1980, Canada has urged the Conference on Disarmament, on the basis of the agreed 1979 United States/USSR drafts, to conclude a treaty on radiological weapons. We are aware, however, that there is considerable reticence on the part of some Conference members to proceed solely on the basis of that proposal. A year ago I emphasized the advantages of coming to grips with the radiological weapons issue, a subject which has been with the international community since 1948, and I suggested that we should all review our respective positions with the objective of approving that draft treaty.

Now, both the United States and the USSR delegations have expressed at this session their desire to achieve an early agreement. My own delegation would support an early consensus on the draft treaty on which United States/USSR agreement has already been reached. We would, however, at the same time, actively support parallel attempts to develop a formula to meet the serious apprehensions that have been expressed regarding attacks on nuclear powered electricity generating stations. Many delegations have stressed the importance they attach to this issue, and it cannot be ignored.

I should like to mention some of the positive effects on the credibility of the Conference for example of reaching an agreement on radiological weapons. Moreover, the resolution of this problem could be extremely useful in terms of "walking" the Conference on Disarmament through the process of reaching an agreement, (something on which we have not had much recent experience). Such an agreement whatever its intrinsic importance, could also help to reinvigorate the institution. The merits of getting the issue "off the table" speak for themselves. Once again, if we could reach agreement quickly on the issue on which there is already agreement -- the common ground -- we could agree to do serious work in the area where views are still divided? Perhaps we could agree on a linkage between the two questions while defraying the decision on the appropriateness of an integrated approach until later in the negotiations, but in the mean time I do not understand why we cannot do anything at all on the subject.

During the period between the 1984 and 1985 sessions of the Conference on Disarmament, the Department of External Affairs in Ottawa undertook a review and assessment of the radiological weapons negotiating process. I hope we shall be able to contribute some of our observations as the 1985 session progresses. Meanwhile, a two-volume compendium of verbatim records of the Conference on Disarmament and Working Papers submitted to this Conference, which had been developed initially as

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a convenience during the review process in Ottawa, has been reproduced by the Canadian Government and sent to Geneva for circulation as a basic document within the Ad Hoc Committee for those who want it. I will therefore be providing copies to the secretariat in sufficient number for distribution to each delegation.

Now, returning to the negotiating process: I think everyone here is fully aware that the Conference on Disarmament must work on many different subjects at one and the same time, since views differ as to their relative importance and on the degree to which they are ripe for solution. We are aware that, in practice, some areas of work are actually more advanced than others and that progress is not uniform. Nevertheless, when one hears of the possibility of progress during this session toward the achievement of a convention on chemical weapons, it would be disturbing if this were viewed as the only subject in which we can make progress. Admittedly, progress on other crucial issues may be linked or seen to be linked to the bilateral negotiations between the two major Powers. We do not accept however that the Conference on Disarmament must mark time while we await the outcome of those bilateral talks. We are convinced that our multilateral efforts can and should complement those bilateral efforts.

It is our firm view that with some better working methods and a willingness to accept sensible accommodations of interests -- not compromises on matters of principle, but genuine reconciliations and accommodations -- we should be able to agree not only to a realistic and practical mandate for an ad hoc committee on a nuclear test ban, as well as on a procedural framework to proceed with substantial discussion on the prevention of nuclear war, but also to achieve concrete progress on a comprehensive convention on chemical weapons and even to conclude a limited agreement on radiological weapons.

I have referred again to the importance of not confusing process with progress. The Conference on Disarmament and its predecessor body have not produced an arms-control agreement in six years. This year will see the fortieth anniversary session of the United Nations. Surely it is time to do better. It is particularly important to do so in view of the imminence of the Third Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Canada for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the President.

Distinguished delegates, we have exhausted the time available to us this morning. As there are three more speakers listed to take the floor today, I intend now to suspend the plenary meeting and to resume it this afternoon at 3 p.m. precisely. We will then listen to them and immediately afterwards we will convene the informal meeting scheduled for today to consider the matters that I mentioned earlier.

Subsequently, the plenary meeting will be resumed in order to formalize any agreements that might be reached at the informal meeting. If I see no objection, the plenary meeting is suspended.

The meeting was suspended at 12.50 p.m. and resumed at 3.00 p.m.