

Statement by Hon. Douglas Roche, O.C.

Defence Policy Review, Edmonton Roundtable, June 4, 2016

I express my appreciation to the Government of Canada for launching a Defence Policy Review. I wish to answer the first question set out in the Public Consultation Document: “Are there any threats to Canada’s security that are not being addressed adequately?” **My answer is that Canada needs to take stronger and more specific action to address the threat to global security posed by the maintenance of nuclear weapons by the major nuclear powers.**

1. The Public Consultation Document, containing much that is admirable, is strangely devoid of any reference to the 15,800 nuclear weapons still in existence or to the ongoing modernization of nuclear arsenals by the nuclear weapons states. *The New York Times* reported on its front page (April 17, 2016) that the United States, Russia and China are now "aggressively pursuing" a new generation of nuclear weapons. "The buildups threaten to revive a Cold War-era arms race and unsettle the balance of destructive force among nations that has kept the nuclear peace for more than a half-century," the paper wrote. The Hon. William Perry, former U.S. Secretary of Defense, has stated: “The danger of a nuclear catastrophe today is greater than during the Cold War.”

2. Canada cannot be oblivious to such threats to our own security, which is inextricably intertwined with global security. Nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation are a fundamental part of the world’s international legal framework. At present, the risks are enormous. Nuclear weapons pose overwhelming dangers to global health, development, the climate, social structures and human rights. The international community needs to consolidate the issues in a coherent multilateral approach, in which human security and survival of the species are placed at the centre of international decision-making. (1)

3. Nearly two decades ago, Canada tried to have NATO change its Strategic Concept, which holds that nuclear weapons are the “supreme guarantee” of security. This stance is incoherent with the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the “unequivocal undertaking” all States parties have made to negotiate the elimination of nuclear weapons. At present, Canada is held back by its

NATO allegiance from a full commitment to participating in ongoing work, under U.N. auspices, to determine the best course for negotiations. The Canadian government, with Global Affairs Canada and DND united on a common goal, must work diplomatically with like-minded states within NATO to pursue work that brings NATO into harmony with the NPT.

4. The Public Consultation Document states: “In accordance with its 2005 decision, Canada does not participate in the United States ballistic missile defence system for the defence of North America. Should this decision be revisited given changing technologies and threats?” My answer is no. Under two Prime Ministers of two different parties (1986 and 2005), Canada has rejected involvement in BMD. The reasons given before are even stronger now. The system will spur a new nuclear arms race because it is an incentive for Russia and China to build stronger offensive systems in order to overwhelm these defences. The North Korean nuclear weapons problem must be resolved diplomatically, just as occurred with Iran. There is very little likelihood that Canadian participation in missile defence would give Canada any more influence than it already has through its many associations. The cost to Canada’s taxpayers would be disproportionate to the value.

5. The Public Consultation Document states: “Canada has a strong interest in contributing to global peace and security given our geography, our reliance on international trade, our international treaty obligations, and our commitment to projecting Canadian values...” DND recognizes that security extends far beyond military operations. Security must flow from an extension of how Canada values international humanitarian law (IHL). Under IHL, combatants are prohibited to use weapons that are inherently indiscriminate or that are of a nature to inflict suffering greater than that required to achieve a set goal. The development of IHL has led to the new humanitarian movement and a Humanitarian Pledge, which calls on all States parties to the NPT to renew their commitment to the urgent and full implementation of existing obligations under Article VI and “identify and pursue effective measures to fill the legal gap for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons” and “cooperate with all stakeholders to achieve this goal.” Although 127 states have signed this pledge, Canada has not because of the NATO Strategic Concept. This anomaly is certainly not reflective of Canadian values.

6. As the president of the International Committee of the Red Cross has stated: “Nuclear weapons are often presented as promoting security, particularly during times of international instability, but weapons that risk catastrophic and irreversible humanitarian consequences cannot seriously be viewed as protecting civilians or humanity as a whole.” (2) The military doctrine of nuclear deterrence is now challenged by a majority of states, which want comprehensive negotiations to begin to find a legal path to the elimination of nuclear weapons.

7. This subject is very much an issue for the Department of National Defence and it is incorrect to say that it is the purview only of Global Affairs Canada. In order to have comprehensive Canadian policy, DND needs to contribute to the formulation of the new Government’s overall policy on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. The Defence Policy Review must speak on this matter.

(1) See “Nuclear Disarmament in Context – A Global Governance Issue,” Working Paper (AC.286/WP.35) submitted by Ireland to Open-ended Working Group Taking Forward Multilateral Nuclear Disarmament Negotiations, Geneva, 2016.

<http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/OEWG/2016/Documents/WP35.pdf>

(2) Peter Maurer, President of the ICRC, *Nuclear weapons: Ending a threat to humanity*, 18 February 2015 <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/nuclear-weapons-ending-threat-humanity>