

Roche Calls on Canada to Sign Prohibition Treaty and Work to Change NATO's "Dangerous" Nuclear Policies; Also Seeks Silent Vigil on Parliament Hill in Ottawa

August 4, 2017 (Toronto) The Canadian government should sign the new Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and work to change NATO's "dangerous nuclear weapons policies," former Senator Douglas Roche told the Hiroshima-Nagasaki Coalition rally August 6 in Toronto.

He also called for two thousand people to hold a silent vigil for two hours on Parliament Hill, Ottawa to express their commitment to a nuclear weapons-free world. A current Facebook campaign aims to reach one million Canadians informing them of the new Treaty, which will open for signature September 20.

The treaty, adopted July 7 by 122 nations at the United Nations, prohibits the development, testing, production, manufacturing and possession of nuclear weapons. For the first time, nuclear weapons have been unconditionally stigmatized as standing outside humanitarian law. When 50 nations have ratified it, the treaty will enter into force and all the signatory states will be committed to "measures for the verified, time-bound and irreversible elimination of nuclear-weapon programmes."

But Canada objects to the treaty because NATO's military doctrine holds that nuclear weapons are the "supreme guarantee" of security, and the U.S. still retains nuclear weapons on the territories of five NATO states in Europe.

"NATO's nuclear policies are dangerous and challenge the development of international law," Roche said. "The use of nuclear weapons would have catastrophic humanitarian consequences, imperilling human survival, the environment, economic development, food security, and the health of current and future generations."

Roche, who is a former Canadian Ambassador for Disarmament, was equally critical of Russia and China for maintaining their nuclear arsenals, but said the U.S. has always taken a leading role in nuclear disarmament matters, and is wrong now in plunging ahead with a \$1 trillion program to modernize its nuclear stocks. The U.S. instructed its NATO allies to oppose the new Prohibition Treaty.

"However, the majority of nations now agree that the faulty doctrine of nuclear deterrence must be replaced with a sincere desire to build a global security architecture without nuclear weapons. This is a struggle of titanic proportions."

Since the new Prohibition Treaty is a direct challenge to NATO's policies, some hold that NATO would first have to change its policies before a NATO state could join. Roche objected to this view on the grounds that the development of international law, which the Treaty is attempting, should take priority over NATO's nuclear policies, which are only political in nature.

He thus aligned himself with the stand taken by the Canadian Pugwash movement that Canada should sign the treaty "with an accompanying statement that Canada will, through dialogue and changes to its own policies and practices, persist in its efforts to bring NATO into conformity with the Treaty, with a view to Canada ratifying the Treaty as soon as possible."

Roche paid tribute to Canada's ongoing work to achieve a treaty cutting off the production of fissile material and also its participation in the development of nuclear

disarmament verification techniques. But he said that this work, without being placed in the framework of a time-bound framework for the elimination of all nuclear weapons, does not address the central problem.

“The central problem is the continued existence of more than 15,000 nuclear weapons and the urgency of achieving and maintaining a nuclear weapons-free world. Prohibiting nuclear weapons is an essential step toward their elimination.”

The present North Korea crisis illustrates the urgency of finding a global solution to the threat posed by nuclear weapons, he added. “There is no military solution to the North Korea problem. A nuclear war can never be won and must never be fought. Diplomatic negotiations, as was done with Iran, must be resumed with North Korea. To be truly successful, nuclear negotiations must be global in scope.”

“I seek a good faith expression by the Government of Canada that it recognizes its responsibilities to humanity to press for comprehensive negotiations for the elimination of nuclear weapons and put those responsibilities over the political doctrine of NATO,” Roche said.

Partial nuclear disarmament does not work, he said. “When William Wilberforce sought an end to slavery, when Mahatma Gandhi marched for freedom from colonialism, when Nelson Mandela went to jail to end apartheid, these historical figures did not settle for half-measures. They addressed the core of those social evils. Nuclear weapons are the ultimate evil. We must attack the core of the nuclear weapons problem — and that is their very existence.”

The current campaign to use the power of Facebook to encourage Canadians to write Prime Minister Trudeau to sign the Prohibition Treaty illustrates how social communications can be effective. So too, Roche added, would the immense power of two thousand Canadians demonstrating peacefully by holding a silent vigil for two hours on Parliament Hill. Canada’s peace groups should combine their strengths to organize such a vigil. Such a demonstration of public opinion could help the government move forward.

“The power of a silent protest may indeed penetrate the halls of government.”

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