

CNANW Panel: November 30, 2015, Ottawa

“Political and Legal Steps: New Initiatives for Canada”

Opening Statement by Hon. Douglas Roche, O.C.

Panel Chairman

I would first like to express my appreciation to Heidi Hulan and her colleagues at Global Affairs Canada for participating in this CNANW Seminar. With the election of a new government, there is an opportunity to recover a sense of cooperation between the government and civil society. This is best done in a positive framework in which good will on both sides is expressed.

We in CNANW renew our expression of good will to the government. But cooperation does not imply agreement on all issues. Indeed, it is the solemn duty of civil society – certainly those elements that are informed and have long experience in dealing with security issues – to clearly articulate a way forward, in this case to a world without nuclear weapons. The government also wants a world without nuclear weapons, as does virtually every state, whether a nuclear possessor or not. Where we differ is on the way to achieve this goal.

The difference is serious and will not be easily resolved. As we move forward, it is incumbent on each side to treat the other with respect and to genuinely consider the merits of the arguments put forward.

The government has stated many times that the “step-by-step” approach is the best route to nuclear disarmament. Therefore, it has done

important work on such issues as CTBT, FMCT, verification, and financial participation in the Global Partnership Program to stop the spread of weapons and materials of mass destruction. It wants NPT work reinvigorated. This work should be commended, and, without hesitation, we recognize it to be well-intentioned.

While the importance of each step is beyond dispute, the lack of a comprehensive, multilateral process denies the world true nuclear disarmament. CNANW believes that “step-by-step” has allowed for the retention and modernization of the 15,800 nuclear weapons still held by nine states. “Step-by-step” does not challenge the core problem: the continuation of the military strategy of nuclear deterrence. CNANW *does* challenge nuclear deterrence as the principal obstacle to nuclear disarmament. It is nuclear deterrence that drives nuclear arms modernization programs.

CNANW, in company with a majority of governments and numerous civil society organizations, wants a global law prohibiting and eliminating nuclear weapons. This would entail a universal, non-discriminatory process, with provision for the irreversible elimination of existing nuclear arsenals and a timeline for verified implementation.

The route to that law is now being debated, but at least the proponents of a law have agreed at the UN “to convene an open-ended working group [OEWG] to substantively address concrete effective legal measures” to achieve a world without nuclear weapons.

It is unfortunate that the previous Canadian government abstained on the resolution setting up the OEWG, holding that it is “premature” to focus on the legal gap to nuclear disarmament. On another resolution, “Ethical Imperatives for a Nuclear Weapon-Free World,” which held that “nuclear

weapons are inherently immoral,” Canada unfortunately voted no. We hope that the new government will support future measures focusing on the core issues of the morality and legality of nuclear weapons.

Our differences notwithstanding, CNANW believes that we can do important work together in a mutual attitude of bridge-building.

What are the government’s concerns? We seek a clear answer.

Are Canadian membership in NATO, which insists that nuclear weapons are the “supreme guarantee” of security, and our close association with the United States, whose military doctrine is centered on nuclear deterrence, prohibitive obstacles to nuclear disarmament?

In posing the issue this way, we are not seeking confrontation with either NATO or the US. But we must ask: is the wish of most Canadians to live in a world free of nuclear weapons, as affirmed in polls, to be thwarted by our defence partners who are, in turn, thwarting the will expressed by the humanitarian movement to end reliance on nuclear deterrence? Should not Canada utilize its very influence within NATO and with the U.S. to push for the formulation of alternative security arrangements that do not rely on nuclear deterrence?

The Liberal Party said during the election campaign that it supports the 2010 Unanimous Motion adopted by both the Senate and House of Commons. Our new Minister of Foreign Affairs himself raised questions about follow-up to this motion during the previous government. That motion endorsed U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s call for negotiations to achieve a nuclear weapons convention or framework of mutually reinforcing instruments. Just as more than 800 members of the Order of Canada have done, we respectfully ask the new government for unambiguous action.

For its part, CNANW and its partners must understand that it is not easy for a NATO country to directly counter NATO policy, nor can it be forgotten that, for the US, Canada's security is integrally involved in North American security. We also need to understand that the government has many "hot" issues on its plate. However, a world without nuclear weapons is unequivocally in the best security interests of Canada and the international community.

From either perspective – the government's or CNANW's – real nuclear disarmament poses tough questions. Can we bridge the two perspectives? Can we bridge the humanitarian movement to NATO and Washington? Can we bridge our aspirations to the political realities?

Out of this seminar, CNANW will put forth to the government a suggested program of action. The government, at its highest levels, needs to put forth, comprehensively, its plans to engage in nuclear disarmament.

I have held throughout my public career that we *can* build bridges to peace and security. Indeed, Canadian values and geography and history demand that we build such bridges. Today at this panel, as we discuss "Political and Legal Steps: New Initiatives for Canada," we have a chance to build anew.