

Testimony by Hon. Douglas Roche, O.C.*

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Canada has long tried to establish a “balance” in its nuclear weapons policies: it has strongly supported the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and its 13-Step Program leading to the elimination of nuclear weapons; and it continues to be a loyal member of NATO, which holds that nuclear weapons are “essential” for the security of its members. Canada has lived with this ambiguity and has tried to reach out in both directions at the same time: it has three years in a row voted at the U.N. for more rapid implementation of the 13 Steps; and it has tried to get NATO to at least review its nuclear weapons policies.

The actions of Canada have enabled this country to become a sort of “bridge” between the NPT and NATO. The heart of my testimony today lies in my belief that the most constructive contribution Canada can now make to upholding the Non-Proliferation Treaty is to take a leadership role and become pro-active in working with like-minded States to press the nuclear weapons States to fulfill their commitments to the NPT.

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In my capacity as Chairman of the Middle Powers Initiative, I have attended all three preparatory meetings for the 2005 Review Conference of the NPT. As Ambassador for Disarmament, I led the Canadian delegation to the 1985 Review. In my experience, the present crisis is the worst in the 34-year history of the NPT.

All five nuclear weapons States are modernizing their nuclear arsenals. Much attention has been paid to the new U.S. “bunker-buster” research program. But attention must also be paid to what Russia is doing. On November 17, 2004 Russian President Vladimir Putin said his country would soon deploy new nuclear missile systems that would surpass those of any other nuclear power. Moreover, the Russians are perfecting land-and-sea based ballistic missiles with warheads that could elude the U.S. Ballistic Missile Defence System.

It is truly shocking that there are still more than 34,000 nuclear weapons in existence, 96 percent of them in the hands of the U.S. and Russia. The reductions both those countries have engaged in are illusory because they are retaining huge stocks and modernizing existing arsenals. This is tempting other countries to join the “nuclear club.” Israel, India and Pakistan are now in. Libya and Iraq tried to get in. North Korea has already left the NPT and Iran has thumbed its nose at it.

The Second Nuclear Age has begun and a new nuclear arms race is underway.

The good will and trust of the past are gone largely because the nuclear weapons States, led by the U.S., have tried to change the rules of the game. At least before, there was a recognition that the NPT was obtained through a bargain, with the nuclear weapons States agreeing to negotiate the elimination of their nuclear weapons in return for all other States shunning the acquisition of nuclear weapons. Now the U.S. is rejecting its previous commitments and asserts that the problem of the NPT lies not in the actions of the nuclear powers in entrenching nuclear weapons in their military doctrines but in the lack of compliance by States such as North Korea and Iran.

The whole international community, nuclear and non-nuclear alike, is concerned about proliferation, but the new attempt by the nuclear weapons States to gloss over the discriminatory aspects of the NPT, which are now becoming permanent, has caused consternation. Many States see a two-class world of nuclear haves and have-nots becoming a permanent feature of the global landscape. Brazil, among many States protesting this situation, said: “Disregard for the provisions of Article VI (of the NPT) may ultimately affect the nature of the fundamental bargain on which the Treaty’s legitimacy rests.” In such chaos, the NPT is eroding and the

prospect of multiple nuclear weapons States, a fear that caused nations to produce the NPT in the first place, is looming once more.

Compounding the nuclear risk is the threat of nuclear terrorism, which is growing day by day. It is estimated that 40 countries have the knowledge to produce nuclear weapons, and the existence of an extensive illicit market for nuclear items shows the inadequacy of the present export control system. Despite the arduous efforts of the International Atomic Energy Agency (which is seriously underfunded relative to the inspection responsibilities it has been given), the margin of security is, as IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei put it, “thin and worrisome.”

Here is what Canada should do immediately. It should work closely with the New Agenda Coalition (Brazil, Egypt, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, South Africa and Sweden) and with the other NATO States (Germany, Norway, The Netherlands, Belgium) which also voted for the New Agenda resolution at the U.N. this fall calling for more speed by the nuclear weapons States in implementing commitments to the NPT. This group of important States can build up the “moderate centre” of the nuclear weapons debate and get action to save the NPT in 2005.

This action has been spelled out by the New Agenda:

- No move by anyone to a new nuclear arms race and universal adherence to the NPT.

- Early entry-into-force of the CTBT.
- Reduction of non-strategic nuclear weapons and no development of new types of nuclear weapons.
- Negotiation of an effectively verifiable fissile material cut-off treaty.
- Establishment of a special body at the Conference on Disarmament to deal with nuclear disarmament.
- Compliance with the principles of irreversibility and transparency and verification capability.

This list is achievable if the nuclear weapons States are truly in the “good faith” called for by the NPT. Canada has an opportunity – and a duty – to help build a bridge to nuclear disarmament through this agenda. The dire circumstances of the nuclear weapons threat compel Canada, a country respected around the world, to replace ambiguity with a pro-active policy for nuclear disarmament.