



**Getting the Truth Out:  
The Group of 78 and Nuclear Weapons**

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**Address to Group of 78  
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The temptation to roam down memory lane on an evening such as this is almost irresistible. But on the topic I have been assigned, nuclear weapons, there is no comfort in nostalgia.

When the first atomic bombs destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, it could hardly have been imagined that sixty years later about 27,000 nuclear weapons would be in existence. The Cold War is long over, but half the world's population still lives under governments brandishing nuclear weapons. More than \$12 trillion has so far been spent on these instruments of mass murder, which is a theft from the poorest people in the world. The present nuclear weapons crisis has, in fact, led to the opening of the Second Nuclear Age.

First, we must understand the dimensions of the crisis. The longstanding nuclear weapons states, the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, and China, are making nuclear weapons permanent instruments of their military doctrines. India, Pakistan and Israel have joined the "nuclear club." North Korea is trying to get into it. Iran is suspected of trying to acquire the capacity to convert nuclear fuels for peaceful purposes into nuclear weapons. NATO is maintaining U.S. nuclear weapons on the soil of six European countries. The U.S. is preparing "reliable replacement" warheads with new military capabilities and undermining the Non-Proliferation Treaty with a nuclear technology deal with India.

Both the U.S. and Russia have put new emphasis on the war-fighting role of nuclear weapons. The nuclear weapons states refuse to give up their nuclear arsenals, and feign surprise that other nations, seeing that nuclear weapons have become the currency of power in the modern world, are trying to acquire them. So are terrorists. No major city in the world is safe from the threat of a nuclear attack. The risk of accidents is multiplying daily. All these are the characteristics of the Second Nuclear Age.

The Group of 78, in its founding statement 25 years ago, was prescient on the nuclear weapons crisis. It stated then that the first priority of Canada's foreign policy should be: "Removal of the threat of nuclear war, the greatest danger facing [humanity] today." It

said that Canada should incorporate in its foreign policy the principal objectives set forth in the Final Document of the 1978 U.N. Special Session on Disarmament. This consensus document, which used to be referred to as “the bible” of nuclear disarmament, set out a path to the complete elimination of nuclear weapons through a comprehensive, phased programme with agreed time lines where possible.

It would be nice to report progress here tonight. But, in fact, a deadly deadlock in nuclear discussions prevails. The goal of the abolition of nuclear weapons has been lost sight of in the new struggle just to keep the Non-Proliferation Treaty alive.

A national blur seems to characterize Canadian public opinion on this issue today. Thankfully, a core group of dedicated activists are still working on the issue, but new networks of concern and action must be formed. Civil society in all its manifestations – community, academic, religious, business, social – must be encouraged to speak out. The Group of 78, with its highly informed membership, can lead the way.

The Canadian people, for the most part, have forgotten what nuclear weapons are all about. The very idea of a nuclear weapon is to kill massively. U.N. studies have shown that the social and economic consequences of a nuclear war in a world intimately interconnected in life-support systems would be catastrophic. Put simply, the Canadian people need to be reminded that nuclear weapons are immoral, illegal, militarily useless, and devoid of any intellectual basis for the promotion of security. They are a blasphemy against God's creation. They have no place in civilized international relations.

If we expect the Canadian government to play a role in pressing the nuclear weapons states to fulfil their legal obligations under the NPT, then civil society must speak out. Civil society has produced results before. Never doubt this. Canada's rejection of the Iraq war and refusal to join the U.S. Ballistic Missile Defence systems are important examples of the Canadian government responding to public opinion – once that opinion is aroused.

Getting the truth out about nuclear weapons runs up against a wall of resistance. Denial. Obfuscation. Apathy. Moreover, with the Canadian government wanting to maintain good relations with the United States, there is a reluctance to interfere in the U.S. government's perceived security demands.

It is well known that U.S. security policies today are driven by the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. But nuclear weapons are not a solution to terrorism. In fact, the only guarantee against a terrorist attack with nuclear weapons is the complete elimination of all nuclear weapons. The security architecture for a nuclear weapons-free world must be built. And here Canada, which has developed a well-earned reputation for verification expertise, can shine.

In such a complex field, Canada cannot do much alone. But working with like-minded states, it can do a lot to bridge the gulf between the nuclear and non-nuclear states. Canada's multilateral diplomatic work on the nuclear agenda in no way diminishes our sensitive inter-relationship with the U.S.'s genuine security needs. Canadian governments

have long balanced the Canada-U.S. bilateral agenda and international work. In fact, it is necessary to inter-twine bilateral and multilateral work because the cities of Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal are just as much at risk of the physical and economic fallout of nuclear warfare as the cities of New York, Los Angeles and Chicago.

Twenty-five years ago, the Group of 78 recognized that Canada's geographical position and historic friendship had established "special relationships with the United States," but warned: "This relationship should not dictate Canadian policy, particularly when actions are undertaken or promoted which are seen to be contrary to Canada's considered obligations and the world's needs." Those words are as true today as a quarter century ago. Canadian security, the Group of 78 has consistently reminded us, "depends on an international effort to maintain an equitable and stable international order."

It takes courage along with vision to speak up today to oppose any country, anywhere, possessing a nuclear weapon. I look to the Canadian government to demonstrate this courage and vision. The Group of 78 must do its part to lead the way.