



GROUP OF 78 DEPLORES FURTHER STEP DOWN BMD SLIPPERY SLOPE

News Release

August 5, 2004

Contact: Peggy Mason, Chair, Group of 78

Telephone: (613) 832-9322

Email: peggymason@bellnet.ca

OTTAWA - Canada has moved one step closer to full participation in the United States Ballistic Missile Defence program without any meaningful public or parliamentary debate, the Group of 78 said today.

It was reacting critically to the announcement by Defence Minister Bill Graham and Foreign Affairs Minister Pierre Pettigrew that the North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD) treaty is being amended to authorize NORAD to make its missile warning function available to the U.S. command of ballistic missile defence.

"However much the government may seek to downplay this amendment as a small technical change to current NORAD missile tracking arrangements, it moves us one step further down a very slippery slope," said Peggy Mason, Group of 78 chair.

She is a former Canadian ambassador to the United Nations for Disarmament.

The Group of 78 is a non-governmental organization dedicated to the study of foreign affairs issues.

"The U.S. does not need Canada for this costly, dangerous and to date completely technically-unproven missile program," Ms. Mason said. "What America does need however is continued Canadian co-operation in the air defence of North America. Indeed it needs that co-operation more than ever since the airplane attacks of Sept. 11."

"This is a core function of NORAD and it is not in any way threatened by Canada staying out of ballistic missile defence."

While strongly critical of the timing of this decision and the secrecy that preceded it, the Group of 78 nevertheless welcomed the government's assurance, in its letter to Secretary

Powell released today, that the decision to amend the NORAD agreement is independent of any discussion on possible co-operation on missile defence.

Peggy Mason underscored that Minister Graham promised an "open and transparent process" and full consultations with Parliament and the public before any final decision would be taken on such co-operation. The Group of 78 therefore calls on Prime Minister Martin to immediately take steps to institute a broad consultative process so that the full implications of Canadian participation in ballistic missile defence can be fully considered before any final decisions are made.

"Russia is actively developing offensive weapons to counter missile defences and so is China and these are exactly the ingredients for a new and deadly arms race." She also noted that any Canadian involvement in a program intended by the United States to lead to the weaponization of space would be a betrayal of our longstanding and respected role as a country dedicated to advancing the cause of international peace and security.

The Group of 78's objectives are removal of the threat of nuclear war, a more equitable international economic order and a strengthened and revitalized United Nations.