73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly - First Committee

General Debate

Statement delivered by H.E. Ms. Rosemary McCarney

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73e Session de l'Assemblée générale des Nations Unies - Première commission

Débat général

Déclaration prononcée par S.E. Mme. Rosemary McCarney


New York, le XX octobre 2018
Mr. Chair,

Allow me to congratulate you and Bureau members on your election, and to assure you of the full support of my delegation.

Canada believes that cooperation, innovation, and inclusiveness are critical to addressing today’s complex international security challenges. No single country can address these challenges alone; we must work together. Moreover, for the international rules-based order to work for all, the rules need to apply to all. Accountability cannot be a luxury afforded only when circumstances allow. Unfortunately, we see these rules under stress in the areas of non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament. Progress in one area is countered by backsliding, sometimes horrendously so, in others.

The norm against the use of chemical weapons has been violated and there is convincing evidence that the transgressors include Syria and Russia, States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention. We reiterate the need to condemn all use of chemical weapons and the importance of supporting the work of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. In addition, we welcome the positive step taken during the CWC’s Fourth Special Session of the Conference of States Parties that gave the OPCW the mandate to attribute responsibility for chemical weapons attacks.

The international security situation compels us to make progress on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, necessitating meaningful action by concerned states. To halt the spread of nuclear weapons, and work towards their elimination, we need to collectively encourage processes that bring opposing parties to the table to discuss their differences, and ensure that existing agreements, such as the JCPOA, are upheld in full. Canada has sought to support initiatives that, while seemingly modest, provide a framework for concrete advances. This includes the efforts to enhance our understanding of what is required for nuclear disarmament verification as this will be critical to achieving longer term disarmament goals.

We were pleased to chair the High-level Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty Expert Preparatory Group which concluded its work in June with the adoption of a consensus report on options for elements of a future treaty. The report describes the potential substance of such a treaty, which Canada believes is essential to advancing nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. While 25 national experts participated in the Prep Group, its Chair twice held consultations for all UN member states to obtain their views and ensure an inclusive approach to the Group’s work. The Chair will brief First Committee members on the Group’s work on 19 October, and Canada, Germany and the Netherlands have put forward an FMCT resolution, which welcomes the work of the Prep Group and its recommendations. We hope to receive wide support from Member States on this resolution.

In the area of conventional weapon treaties and conventions, especially the Arms Trade Treaty, we are heartened by the work being undertaken although there is a need to further
clarify and focus our efforts within the ATT. Canada has also been pleased by the discussions on Lethal Autonomous Weapons which we believe are moving ahead at a reasonable pace and in a constructive manner through the CCW GGE process ably steered by India.

What has troubled us is the precarity of the conventional weapons conventions, and the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention. While financial models may differ, Canada is open to a range of initiatives that would put each of the conventions on a sustainable financial footing. Ultimately, however, the financial health of each convention depends on each state party paying its assessed contributions, along with its arrears. This is a responsibility that, while different from upholding the norms of the conventions, is no less important to each convention’s full implementation. It is part of the rules we agreed to uphold in joining each convention.

Responsible behaviour and international cooperation are also essential in ensuring the peaceful and sustainable use of outer space. Activities in the space domain and dual-use space technologies require careful governance to ensure all states continue to benefit from space assets and services. We are optimistic that the current GGE on PAROS will identify potential elements of a legally-binding instrument which would complement norms of responsible behaviour in outer space. We also commend the consensus in COPUOS on 21 guidelines for the long-term sustainability of outer space activities.

Canada welcomes the Secretary General’s Agenda for Disarmament and its Implementation Plan, both for the effort to capture the range and scope of current global disarmament challenges, and for seeking to leverage the considerable capabilities of the United Nations as a critical influencer in this field. We will work with the Secretary-General and the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs on the Agenda, as and where appropriate.

Finally, we wish to reiterate the ongoing importance of reflecting gender perspectives in disarmament and international security. This year, in Geneva, with the active collaboration of civil society groups, Canada hosted a workshop on gender and disarmament for interested missions. Many of those missions and civil society groups shared a strong desire to work together to promote gender perspectives and agreed to collaborate on this effort at First Committee. The group has since advocated with a number of sponsors for the incorporation of gender perspectives in their resolutions, and has been heartened by their openness to doing so. In this spirit, our own FMCT resolution includes language recognising the importance of equal participation of women in all processes to advance an FMCT.

Thank you.