

## **Canadian Leadership on Nuclear Disarmament**

Workshop presented by  
Canadian Network to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (CNANW)  
and  
Canadians for a Nuclear Weapons Convention (CNWC)

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### **Rapporteur's Report**

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#### *Overview*

The workshop “Canadian Leadership for Nuclear Disarmament” jointly hosted by the Canadian Network to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (CNANW) and Canadians for a Nuclear Weapons Convention (CNWC) brought together civil society and academic experts with Canadian government representatives to dissect the current nuclear weapons context and identify opportunities for civil society engagement and Canadian government leadership on disarmament and non-proliferation.

Key points from the discussion emphasize the coalescence of crisis and opportunity:

- We face a global nuclear crisis that threatens to undo years of progress on non-proliferation and disarmament and risks nuclear escalation and confrontation;
- NATO’s nuclear posture is an affront to disarmament and contributes to this crisis;
- Current Government of Canada positions on NATO and the Treaty on the Prevention of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) are complicit in this crisis;
- Canada has previously played a positive role in advancing peace and disarmament internationally;
- Canada’s emphasis on a feminist foreign policy and desire for greater international prominence including a seat at the UN Security Council provide an opportunity to encourage renewed leadership;
- There is a desire from both civil society and Parliamentarians for Canada to resume a leadership position on nuclear disarmament, not least within NATO;
- Better relations with Russia are critical for progress on both non-proliferation and disarmament;
- Practical options are available to initiate change in NATO’s nuclear posture and reduce tensions with Russia;
- Civil society is critical for both maintaining pressure on governments and as a source of guidance and knowledge;
- To raise the public profile of nuclear abolition, current civil society efforts must reach more broadly to engage new movements and issues with which we share common interests in peace, survival, and an alternative future.

The current moment is urgent. The new nuclear arms race, involving “modernization” in all arsenals and new nuclear use doctrines, risk a nuclear confrontation as well as long-term damage to disarmament efforts. At the same time, shifting international power structures create new opportunities for leadership toward a world without nuclear weapons.

### *Part I: A Nuclear Inflection Point*

The keynote address by **Joe Cirincioni** – President of the Ploughshares Fund in the United States – titled “Nuclear Insecurity in the Age of Trump and Putin” outlined the current crisis that defines the contemporary strategic context in which nuclear weapons are situated.

The parameters of this crisis are threefold:

- Danger on the Korean peninsula
- Growing confrontation between the United States and Iran
- Renewed nuclear arms race among nuclear weapons states

While the security situation on the Korean peninsula has shifted toward unprecedented diplomacy and seems to be giving way to a new security dynamic, Cirincioni stressed that it is not clear if this progress will continue in the absence of robust political encouragement and support. In contrast, the relationship between Iran and the United States continues to deteriorate. The US Administration’s withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) to inspect Iranian nuclear facilities and prevent its pursuit of nuclear weapons includes sanctions on firms and allies who engage in legal business practices with the regime. Moreover, the demands being made of Iran are described as an unconditional surrender. Not only are diplomatic paths to peace being closed, but there is a strong potential for direct confrontation through mutual presence and competing interests on the ground in Syria, which could unintentionally escalate.

The ability to contain these two non-proliferation crises is compromised by a crisis of disarmament among nuclear weapons states. Nuclear capabilities and delivery systems are being modernized and military doctrines revised in such a way that their use is slipping from an unthinkable, strategic deterrent to a useable, tactical weapon of limited warfare. This is dangerous. Not only does it risk catastrophic escalation, but the basic compromise that facilitated non-proliferation – the promise of disarmament – faces a death knell. The steady path of nuclear reductions over the past three decades has halted and been replaced with *re-armament*. Cirincioni describes this as an *inflection point*: once it gets going, it will be very difficult to turn back.

This sentiment is echoed by Ambassador **Paul Meyer** from The Simons Foundation, who equated the contemporary arms race between the world’s nuclear superpowers to the strategic standoff of the 1970s and ‘80s. Emphasizing previous Canadian leadership under Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, Meyer described his “strategy of suffocation,” which proposed to cut off the oxygen feeding nuclear armament by banning warhead testing, ending test flights of warhead delivery vehicles, prohibiting further fissile materials production, and cutting spending on nuclear weapons. The earlier Prime Minister Trudeau was willing to expend political capital to challenge dominant security dynamics in pursuit of peace through reasoned policy alternatives.

Calling on Canada to move from “inertia to initiative,” Meyer offered the following recommendations:

- Voice concern that a new nuclear arms race is emerging and that it brings unacceptable risks for the international community;

- Reject the excuse that arms control and disarmament cannot progress because we have a difficult international environment with which to contend;
- Call for a prompt return to a US-Russia strategic dialogue and preservation of existing arms control and disarmament agreements;
- Acknowledge that the NPT is under threat, including from wide-spread weapons modernization programs, and recognize that the multilateral disarmament foreseen by this treaty requires concrete expression;
- Pursue leadership on a Fissile Materials Cut-off Treaty (FMCT) by seeking to obtain UN General Assembly authorization for a multilateral negotiation of such a treaty;
- Resist efforts to extend earthly conflict into outer space by once again advocating the non-weaponisation of this domain;
- Embrace a recommitment to multilateral disarmament diplomacy and re-invest in the resources required to support this.

Discussion emphasized opportunities and constraints for non-US leadership on nuclear disarmament, particularly by allies within NATO. Noting current tensions within the Alliance and ebbing American leadership, there is a sensed opportunity for members to break with the Alliance on nuclear issues, particularly if encouraged to do so. Similarly, the current crisis in the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) process presents an opportunity for other countries to step forward and lead on this issue. The success of the Nuclear Ban Treaty speaks to this opening. Canada's bid for a UN Security Council seat is noted as a chance to exert influence.

#### *Part II: NATO'S "supreme guarantee"*

Focused on the role of NATO in the elimination of nuclear weapons, the second panel sought to elucidate the constraints that it imposes on disarmament and its role in the current nuclear crisis while identifying opportunities for Canada to advance disarmament from within the Alliance. All speakers emphasized the critical need for re-engagement with Russia.

**Ernie Regehr**, with The Simons Foundation and the Centre for Peace Advancement, pointed out that NATO does not itself have nuclear weapons and that NATO's status as a nuclear weapons alliance is based on the willingness of individual Alliance members with nuclear weapons (or those with US nuclear weapons on their soil by virtue of nuclear sharing) to make their capabilities available for collective operations. In this context NATO's Strategic Concept communicates the circumstances under which use of nuclear weapons might be considered. The Brussels Summit Declaration issued after the meeting of the North Atlantic Council 11-12 July 2018 included a fulsome defence of nuclear weapons as the *"supreme guarantee of the security of allies."* Further, there is growing allusion to the potential for nuclear weapons use in a variety of situations including in response to conventional attack and in a pre-emptive first strike, which must be understood in the context of weapons modernization programs and entrenching nuclear sharing within Europe

The idea that nuclear weapons of unlimited destructive capacity could be the foundation of security is, quite simply, offensive, particularly as the Alliance also continues to claim that it seeks to create the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons.

Regehr offered the following recommendations to move once again toward détente with Russia as a means of reducing the role of nuclear weapons in national and alliance defence policies:

- Adopt realistic language to limit the role of nuclear weapons and highlight the commitment to a world without nuclear weapons, replacing language that characterizes weapons of massive destructive capacity as a supreme guarantee of security;
- Commit to no first use of nuclear weapons;
- Repatriate all B61 bombs to the US;
- Refrain from acquiring dual capable aircraft by non-nuclear weapons states;
- Pursue missile defence cooperation with Russia;
- Reinvest in NATO-Russia dialogue and diplomatic engagement

**Peggy Mason**, President of the Rideau Institute and former Ambassador for Disarmament, presented the recommendations of the all-party, unanimous report submitted by the House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence in June 2018 regarding Canada and NATO. Recommendation 21 included a welcome call for the government to “...take a leadership role within NATO in beginning the work necessary for achieving the NATO goal of creating the conditions for a world free of nuclear weapons.” Emphasizing the urgency of this issue, the report called attention to several of the points raised by disarmament experts including the renewed risk of nuclear proliferation, potential deployment of tactical nuclear weapons, and changes in nuclear doctrines to lower the threshold of use. The report is a welcome sign of political consensus, and a testament to the influence of civil society, on a specific policy option that could contribute to gradual nuclear disarmament.

Ms. Mason further underscored key themes emerging from the day’s discussion, such as global dissatisfaction with stagnant disarmament trends, and the contrast between previous Canadian leadership and contemporary inaction, including boycotting of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW).

**Tom Sauer** from the University of Antwerp in Belgium addressed the divergence of European civil society perspectives from the actions of NATO member states with regards to the TPNW. On the one hand, opinion polls show that most Europeans are against the presence of nuclear weapons in Europe and favour signing the Treaty. However, the issue is not adequately discussed or debated at a public level. Secrecy and lack of transparency on behalf of NATO make it difficult for both journalists and activists to engage the issue, and this limits the impact of peace movements.

Within NATO, it is clear that members are reluctant to lead efforts to change the Alliance’s nuclear posture, or to deviate from one another in other disarmament fora.

And yet leadership and change are possible. For example, the Netherlands is the only NATO member to have participated in the TPNW process, which itself was not anticipated just a few years ago. And while the Treaty may not eliminate nuclear weapons quickly, it is essential for stigmatizing their use – particularly in the current crisis – and stimulating new debate within civil society.

Discussion re-iterated the need for engagement on nuclear disarmament, diplomatically within NATO and with Russia, as well as by civil society and journalists. The Arctic was raised as an example of how a security community can be created around shared interests.

### *Part III: Political Disengagement*

Limited participation on the parliamentary panel “Canadian Leadership on Nuclear Disarmament” illustrated the current political climate of *disengagement* with nuclear disarmament. All major Canadian

political parties were invited to present their positions. The NDP's Agricultural Critic, the **Hon. Alistair MacGregor**, (substituting for the Party Foreign Policy spokesperson who was travelling) was the only person to participate directly. Noting that his party has long opposed nuclear weapons, he asserted that it was a strong proponent of Recommendation 21 within the Standing Committee's report. MacGregor further questioned how Canada can be "back" while simultaneously failing to participate in the most important disarmament negotiations in years, and pointed to a shift in stance by the Liberal party from its time in opposition.

The Hon. Doug Roche read a statement provided by the current **Government of Canada** in response to a petition filed on behalf of constituents regarding the TPNW. It emphasized the government's actions to advance disarmament and its commitment to a pragmatic pursuit of a world without nuclear weapons that takes into account the current security environment. In this environment, the government does not believe that the Treaty will be effective in achieving nuclear disarmament and *does not intend to sign the treaty*. Instead, its diplomatic efforts are to focus on inclusive measures that unite nuclear and non-nuclear armed states in common goals, specifically the pursuit of a Fissile Materials Cut-off Treaty (FMCT).

A statement submitted by Elizabeth May, leader of the Green Party of Canada, congratulated Setsuko Thurlow on her Nobel recognition for her contributions to the TPNW and the work of the CNANW, referring to the current situation as an "apocalyptic age."

Discussion reiterated the importance of civil society expertise and advocacy, which Parliamentarians rely on for research and guidance. It was also noted that civil society should urge Parliamentarians to join the Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Network (PNND).

#### *Part IV: The Way Forward*

Mr. Cirincione addressed the final session on "Next Steps for Nuclear Abolition," outlining the approach of the Ploughshares Fund to, first prevent the worst from happening, and then to build the world that we would like to see. This approach involves engaging politicians now to help them develop policies prior to future elections, finding ways to support positive goals set by the current Administration – including peace with North Korea – and supporting the next generation of civil society leadership on non-proliferation and disarmament. Calling ICAN "*a flare that goes up in the night*," he cautioned that the current disarmament effort will not be able to rely on a mass anti-nuclear movement for change, but instead must build ties between nuclear disarmament and other mass movements of today. For example, cross-cutting feminist and environmental movements likewise question existing power dynamics and strive for an alternative future.

The remainder of the session was used to reflect on the learnings of the day and to share ideas for future work.

Returning to Recommendation 21 of the report by the Standing Committee on National Defence regarding NATO and the elimination of nuclear weapons, several speakers emphasized writing to the government prior to the release of its official response, both to express support and to raise questions about how disarmament processes might be raised within various bodies of the Alliance. It was noted that this might be a fruitful avenue for Canadian leadership in the context of its bid for a seat at the UN Security Council.

Conversation also explored options for engaging Nuclear Weapons States (NWS) in steps toward disarmament. It was noted that the UN General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution on fissile materials negotiation in 2016 was supported by 159 states, including three yes votes from NWS and two abstentions. In this context, the Government of Canada continues to prioritize efforts to bring NWS around the table and to create space for dialogue on the issue of a FMCT. Others urged the UNGA First Committee meetings and the NPT Review Conference as opportunities for leadership. The importance of continued Canadian support for the JCPOA was emphasized.

From a civil society perspective, the re-institution of the annual civil society consultation on arms control and disarmament by Global Affairs Canada is viewed as a positive step. The opportunity for additional civil society engagement with the government through its feminist foreign policy and the newly created position of Ambassador for Women, Peace, and Security was noted with cautious optimism, so that the core value of *peace* within feminism is emphasized. Work to this effect is currently being done by the Canadian Women, Peace and Security Network.

Overall, there is a recognition of a David v. Goliath moment. Disarmament advocates are outgunned (no pun intended) and underfunded. Within civil society, we need to raise funds and raise our voices, build new relationships, and foster creativity in our efforts to advance a world free of nuclear weapons. The need is urgent.