



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau secured the support of Senegalese President Macky Sall in Canada's bid for a UN Security Council seat on his recent trip to the country, but Canada's backing of UN efforts towards nuclear disarmament would be a more worthy endeavour, writes Douglas Roche. *Twitter photograph by Adam Scotti*

Nuclear disarmament rep's visit a good time to flex Canadian foreign policy muscle

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau would better display Canada's worthiness for a UN Security Council seat by action to back the body's efforts to put some teeth in nuclear disarmament.



Douglas Roche

Nuclear disarmament

EDMONTON—In a world that seems every week to be further jettisoning international law on global security as ugly national populism rises, is there any hope for the elimination of nuclear weapons? Or is nuclear disarmament a mirage, its wispy allure always over an ever-clouding horizon?

Well, perhaps the same question could have been put to those courageous souls who started the campaigns against slavery, against colonialism, against apartheid. It took years and years before the critical mass of public opinion turned against these evils, thereby making political action a necessity. We are now witnessing the power of such a transformation moment with the issue of climate change.

The other great issue of our times, nuclear disarmament, is facing perhaps the gravest nuclear weapons challenge since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, and needs the same illumination that global warming

is now receiving. At least, that is the view of Canadians for a Nuclear Weapons Convention (CNWC), whose pleas to the Canadian government for an action program on nuclear disarmament have been supported by more than 1,000 recipients of the Order of Canada.

To bring up the spotlight, CNWC is sponsoring, Feb. 19-20, a visit to Ottawa of the United Nations High Representative for Disarmament, Izumi Nakamitsu, the highest-ranking UN official on disarmament matters. Nakamitsu, a highly experienced Japanese diplomat, believes Canada can play an "important and bridge-building role" at a key meeting of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to be held this spring in New York. She'll bring her message to Foreign Minister François-Philippe Champagne, Parliamentarians, civil society leaders, and a University of Ottawa public lecture.

Nakamitsu is calling for "a return to dialogue based on respect for one another's legitimate security interests."

That's a big order at a time when U.S.-Russian diplomatic relations are floundering, new supersonic missiles are in production, and existing treaties to curb a nuclear arms race are being stamped on. Instead of phasing out nuclear weapons, the Trump administration wants to increase nuclear weapons spending next year to an unbelievable \$46-billion. Russia is struggling to catch up.

Recently, the Doomsday Clock, founded by the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, was set at 100 seconds to midnight, signifying the most perilous moment the world has faced in several decades. The atomic scientists are not alone in issuing such a dire warning about the possible use of the 14,000 nuclear weapons still held by nine countries. The UN Institute for Disarmament Research recently said the risk of nuclear weapons being used is at its highest since the Second World War.

Any use of a nuclear weapon would have catastrophic humanitarian consequences, as many states and a legion of civil society activists have insisted. This outcry led to the adoption of the 1978 Treaty on the Production of Nuclear Weapons,

which would outlaw the possession of nuclear weapons. The big nuclear states all oppose this delegitimization of the military doctrine of nuclear deterrence.

It's not just the nuclear weapons states that are the problem. So is NATO, which clings to the obsolete maxim that nuclear weapons constitute the "supreme guarantee" of security. The NATO states won't sign the Prohibition Treaty either. The Treaty needs 50 states to ratify it (currently 33 have). But even when it enters into force, the big states will ignore it—unless the rest of the world speaks up.

This brings us to the NPT and Canada—and Nakamitsu's visit to Ottawa.

The principal nuclear arms control treaty still in existence is the NPT, marking its 50th anniversary this year. When the NPT was reviewed and made permanent in 1995, the nuclear weapons sites pledged

"systemic" action for disarmament, including a test ban treaty and negotiations to cut off production of fissile materials. None of that happened. In 2000, they gave an "unequivocal undertaking" to the total elimination of nuclear weapons. Still, nuclear weapons are being modernized and a new arms race is upon us.

At the 2000 Review Conference, Canada played a major role in working with like-minded states behind the scenes to get the big powers to agree to live up to their NPT commitments. Over the years, Canadian diplomats played key roles in moving the agenda forward. Recently, Canada called nuclear disarmament a "noble" cause, and said: "We have to learn to think in a new way." But sentiments are not enough. The government must overcome its fears of Washington's hostile reactions—the same way then-prime minister Pierre Trudeau boldly pushed Washington and Moscow for nuclear disarmament action many years ago.

The current Canadian government very much wants to be elected to a non-permanent seat on the Security Council. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has personally campaigned for this in Africa. He would better display Canada's worthiness for a Security Council seat by action to back the UN's efforts to put some teeth in nuclear disarmament.

Nakamitsu's visit is perfectly timed to get Ottawa to move. Though she will undoubtedly speak very diplomatically to the government, the meaning of her words and the confidence she is placing in Canada will be well understood.

Douglas Roche was a Member of Parliament from 1972 to 1984, a Senator from 1998 to 2004, and is also a former Canadian ambassador for disarmament and author. His most recent book is Hope Not Fear: Building Peace in a Fractured World.

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