

Stephen Lewis
*Canadian Representative ,
United Nations, New York*

The Role of Canada in World Peace

Abstract

Canada's role in world peace can be active on four different fronts. The first is the network of citizen organizations that spans the country. They are to be admired for untiring efforts. Public education is the second area of activity for this cause. The debate is too big to be left out of the schools. It is one of the great life and death issues. The House of Commons – the citizen's legal vehicle for change – must be influenced by the citizenry to discuss the peace issue and keep it in the public eye. Finally, Canada's reputation internationally allows Canada to play a leading role in world issues. This opportunity must not be missed.

I can't help looking back, as I listen to the mayor (of Hiroshima), to the events of 1945 and recollecting with you that the charter of the United Nations was drafted in June of 1945, and the general assembly met in the fall of '45, but the bomb was dropped in August of '45. I have often thought as I look back on it, that had the bomb preceded the drafting of the charter, we might have had a rather different charter, a rather different United Nations, a rather different set of expectations, and far fewer illusions, and far greater reality about the nuclear age. And it's one of those accidents of history that events occurred as they did, because the dropping of the bomb catapulted us into the arms race, the rigidity of the ideological power blocks, and the emergence of the super powers

As I pondered my approach to this subject I wanted to eschew banalities, and I certainly don't want to recite at length what is obvious to everyone in this room: that peace would be possible in this world if the talks that are taking place were talks of substance. If we all ended testing, reduced the arsenals, subsequently phased out all nuclear weapons, including

those possessed by China, the United Kingdom and France, dismantled the military alliances, redistributed the funds thereby generated to the impoverished parts of the world, evoked a sudden emergence of trust of supernatural proportions around this earth, embraced the rule of law through the paramouncy of the United Nations, and if the United States and the U.S.S.R. were collaborating on the solutions to regional conflicts, then peace would be possible. But all of that, as everyone in this audience knows, merely begs the question. The real question, when one addresses the subject of how to make peace possible, is to find out how we get there. If I may, I would like to answer with some personal reflections based on eighteen months at the United Nations, with a necessarily and, I hope, appropriately Canadian perspective. Although it is absolutely right that this conference be held and these issues be dealt with in the International Year of Peace, our conference must necessarily be measured against the sad and unavoidable pessimism of whether this world can pull it off, whether we can indeed make peace possible. It is, as we meet, a bleak and dreadful international environment. But you will surely agree with me that none of us must succumb to immobilizing inertia. One must keep trying and, in the process of trying, isolate those ingredients or those approaches within one's own country, which seem to give singular authenticity to what we want to achieve. I would like to share with you the following four thoughts and propositions which flow from my most recent experience.

Number one, in the attempt to make peace possible, we must, within Canada, celebrate and strengthen the role of all those proliferating organizations which magnificently constitute the peace movement in Canada. I have always been filled with admiration for them. I have come to appreciate, as never before, the strength, the intelligence, the tenacity, the indefatigability of the peace movement and those who are a part of it. The stronger they are the better are our prospects for peace, and the more informed and aroused our citizenry will be. One must never allow all those organizations who fight the good fight, who inform the world, to be rendered into a sense of impotence, or rendered, by the sophisticated establishment of societies, into a kind of marginal position. I think that it is perfectly right and perfectly useful for an organization like Operation Dismantle to challenge the Federal Government in court. It is perfectly right and perfectly useful for a project, like Plowshares, to oppose Cruise testing. It is perfectly right and immensely important for a Voice of Women to speak strongly against the opposition that is shown to the nuclear freeze. It is perfectly appropriate and perfectly right that all of the peace organizations collaborate in their public views on Star Wars and Star Wars research. It is perfectly legitimate to challenge the validity of alliances. It is perfectly legitimate for the Lawyers for Social Responsibility to pursue conferences on the illegality of nuclear weapons (if that is the subject matter which they explore). It is right and useful that across Canada individual municipalities declare nuclear free zones as an exercise of symbolic opposition to much of

the lunacy which extends through this globe. In other words, it's all part of a throbbing democratic society. It raises public consciousness. And, in the process of raising public consciousness, it helps make peace possible. More than that, it removes so much of the passivity and fear which people feel. It engages human beings in action.

I am often approached, as so many of you are, by individual Canadians who say: "What can I do?" Well, one of the things individual Canadians can do is to become engaged in all of those non-governmental organizations which take so much of their time and commitment and effort to achieve some element of sanity in this world. And the utility of that cannot be overstated. It's tremendously important that Ambassador Roach has brought together again, the consultative group in Canada so that the non-governmental organizations have a voice in government. It is tremendously important that the Institute for International Peace and Security funds so many of these organizations and their projects, so that one forges a kind of amalgam of enlightenment and opinion in our country, recognizing that to strengthen these social forces is to build the kind of population and citizenry which will one day help to make peace possible.

That brings me to the second point - the need to reform public education, and the public education system across the country, in a way which is entirely, I think, salutary. It is a mockery that education in the issues of peace is not an automatic part of every curriculum through the primary and secondary school system. How ironic it is that Driver Education, and Sex Education, and Education on Drugs - all of them worth while, I belittle them not - have an absolutely fundamental place in the school system, but Education for Survival does not. This is a conference which involves a number of educational institutions and teacher federations. It is therefore important, it seems to me, that questions of curriculum for peace be discussed. Obviously, there are boards of education, here and there across the land, which engage in this kind of activity. But it's always such a struggle. It's always done initially in the face of remarkable philistinism. You have to work at it very hard, because it's swathed in controversy. How many times have I heard trustees, and other officials of educational bureaucratic establishments, saying to me that teachers aren't dispassionate enough and objective enough to deal with the issues of peace and other - you will forgive me - such intellectual blather? No one expects people to be dispassionate and objective when dealing with human issues. We all bring our biases and prejudices to the subject matter. What one wants to do is make possible within a curriculum in the school system a sense of what the issues are. Engage youngsters in intellectual debate on the great life and death issues of the age. "What the devil" are schools for if not to deal with such subject matter?

I want to go a step further and say that it's not just a question of information. It's also a question of generating activism. It's a way in

which one removes a great deal of the numbness and the apathy and the fear so many individuals and so many of the youngsters feel, because one engages them in the reality of debate. It's all there and it should all be discussed. There is nothing wrong with discussions of a Cruise Missile testing program, or the Freeze, or Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), or concepts of deterrence, or concepts of shields, or the arms race itself, or comparisons of fire power, or the military alliances, or the excellent United Nations simulations which are beginning to grow across Canada and engage young minds in questions of problem solving and the coping with regional conflicts. Issues like terrorism, about which there are obviously such profound differences of opinion, deserve, as part of the contemporary rubric of a civilized democratic society, to be talked of in the school system. When you have an informed citizenry emerging, that too helps make peace possible.

That leads me to the third observation which I want to make. We need a strengthened climate of political debate on issues of peace in Canada. One of the things, which has surprised me over the years, is the way in which we tend to diminish matters of foreign policy, and arms control and disarmament, and the great issues of peace in this country. We don't give them sufficient exposure in the Parliament of Canada. It wasn't so many years ago when we were allocating merely one day, sometimes no more than two in an entire year, to foreign policy considerations. It wouldn't be wrong to have a major foreign policy debate every single quarter of the year in the House of Commons in a country like this. There is no reason why it should be so often confined to question periods, and to emergency debates. I can understand the preoccupation with trade, and with debts, and with jobs, and with inflation. Many of us in the room have fought about them all our adult lives. But questions of peace and disarmament are surely as compelling, surely as important, surely as worthy of public debate in the Parliament of Canada. It is sad, I think, that it doesn't happen with a frequency and a capacity which gives legitimacy to the subject matter. This is a good time to press that case. We have a Foreign Minister who is particularly susceptible to engaging in that kind of debate. We have a foreign policy review taking place in Canada. We have an environment which I think would welcome it rather more than has been the case hitherto. Indeed it would give us an opportunity for the kind of media exposure on the issues which creates an alerted citizenry, and helps make peace possible. The more one has media exposure in this country the more valuable it is

That leads me finally to the fourth point I want to make, that is, quite simply, a special role for Canada. We are unquestionably, as a country, part of the western democratic tradition; we're part of the western alliance. We're not an honest broker anymore, treating between East and West, but we have authority. We do have this extraordinary independent

voice. And my own view is that Canada should and can exercise a greater international role. We're gradually doing so; we must do more. When one is at the United Nations as a Canadian, one is constantly approached by other countries to have Canada involved in the compelling issues of the moment. If there is a financial crisis, they want Canada at the centre of discussions for a solution. If there is a crisis on institutional reform, Canada is expected to bring countries together to discuss it. If we're dealing with the decade which culminated in Nairobi, and the questions of equality for women, Canada emerges within the western block as the lead country on these issues. If we're dealing with the African famine, countries want Canada to be involved for all of the history of the Commonwealth, and all of the contributions we have made over time. If we're dealing with U.N.I.C.E.F., and their pleading for money for mass universal immunization, it is to Canada they turn. If one wants a country to bridge between the United Nations on the one hand, and the Commonwealth on the other, in the pursuit of sanctions against South Africa, Canada plays an integral and indispensable role. If we're pursuing particular initiatives in the First Committee in Arms Control and Disarmament, Canada is seen as an indispensable actor. As a matter of fact, we chair a western group meeting with regularity on questions related to arms control and disarmament because it is such an appropriate role for Canada. In other words, we have the authority virtually conferred on us, and there is great potential for this country to play an increasingly significant role on the international stage. Whether this world lives or dies will be decided between the United States and the Soviet Union in Geneva. It is not likely to be decided in a multilateral debating forum, like that of the United Nations, with one hundred and fifty-nine member states. But, whether we are thus abridged in part or not, there is this extraordinary and singular opportunity we have to make our voices heard strong, identifiable, unequivocal, uncompromising in one forum after another. Increasingly we are doing and must do this.

At the First Committee on Arms Control and Disarmament in New York in the United Nations, the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, at the Disarmament Commission back in New York, at the Mutual Balanced Force Reduction (MBFR) talks in Vienna, the talks on Confidence in Security Building in Stockholm, in all of our bilateral relationships, what we must do is to speak to the things about which Canada feels most strongly:

- . A comprehensive test ban, in a way which shows not so much as a jot or tittle of equivocation.
- . Peaceful uses of outer space. (We are the only major partner in the alliance which said "no" to government involvement in SDI, and it gives to Canada within the international arena a particular credibility which should not be easily disparaged.)
- . Dealing with questions such as nuclear winter.

. Dealing with verification. (Ambassador Roach guided through a resolution on verification in the last session of the General Assembly on which there was, for the first time in the U.N.'s history, consensus and unanimity .)

. Taking an issue such as disarmament and development, pursuing it to the conference in Paris this year (1986). (An issue which the United States has already disavowed, by saying it will not attend the conference.)

. Dealing with those juxtapositions which so unsettle every thinking person. (Seventeen trillion dollars have been spent on arms since 1945, and every day in 1986 forty-thousand children under the age of five were dying of preventable diseases; nine hundred and seventy billion dollars were spent on arms in 1984, and thirty-six billion dollars were spent on development assistance; three million children who could be inoculated against preventable diseases, for the cost of three fighter planes; forty-three nations in this world with the highest infant mortality rate, exceeding one hundred deaths per one thousand live births; forty-three countries which spend three to four times as much on defence as they do on health. The obscenity of those disparities is one of the ways of engaging the world in questions of peace, alerting the citizenry, educating it.)

Finally, there are the enormous questions of overcoming the terrible deprivation and underdevelopment in international society from which so much of the conflict and war emanates. The trite observation that peace is not just the absence of war, speaks of course to all these areas of the Third World, to a continent like Africa in particular. There Canada's role is absolutely indispensable. We provided, as a matter of interest for this audience, the highest per capita giving in the western world during the African famine. We are prepared, as other countries are not, to discuss questions of international debt. We seek solutions to the questions of commodity pricing, questions of agriculture, questions of decertification, all of the questions which will finally result, if they are solved, in the revival of the continent and the Third World community.

To the extent that it is possible to make peace possible, Canada and her citizens have a vital role to play. And there is no reason, other than the recognition of the difficulty, to flag, to cease the commitment, to draw back from dedication. We're fighting for the survival of the human race; there is nothing on this earth which better engenders a massive political, economic, social, cultural, and indeed, spiritual dedication.