

**REMARKS (recorded) - ENGLISH**  
**The Honourable Marc Garneau**  
**Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada**

**Conference of Disarmament high-level week**  
**February 22, 2021**

Dear colleagues,

Distinguished colleagues, it is a real honor to join with you today for this important discussion.

One of Canada's key priorities is upholding the rules-based international order that continues to guide our engagements and efforts towards more peace and security. More than 70 years' ago, leaders started building this framework that has allowed us to cooperate and make progress in countless fields. Today, it is our turn and our great responsibility to continue building, improving and modernizing this framework.

Unfortunately, we are seeing worrying trends with potentially devastating consequences: increased tensions are fanning differences between states; inflexible national positions make compromise more difficult; and more States are moving away from multilateral measures when it comes to national security. However, we all know that States can best safeguard their security by fully engaging with their regions and the rest of the world. Multilateral arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament measures offer us a path to lasting peace and security.

The Conference on Disarmament has a special role to play in achieving a more peaceful and secure world. But to fulfill this role and its potential, members must re-engage and strive to come up with a cohesive plan. We must show flexibility in restoring the Conference's negotiating mandate. Canada is committed to working side-by-side with other 2021 Presidents toward that goal.

A critical step should be to launch negotiations for a treaty on fissile materials, and our political will is key if we want to be successful. The groundwork for the negotiations has been laid, and the final product, including the key question as to whether this will be a cut-off treaty, will be determined through negotiations.

On nuclear non-proliferation, Canada has embraced cross-regional groups as a way to strengthen Treaty implementation. The Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative and the Stockholm Initiative on nuclear disarmament have together led to practical recommendations to advance all three pillars of the Treaty at its upcoming Review Conference.

Other weapons of mass destruction remain a concern to Canada. The Syrian Arab Republic has most recently been identified as having used chemical weapons in March 2017. We reiterate our message that Syria must enter into compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention and perpetrators must be held accountable.

Also troubling is the attempted assassination of Alexei Navalny in Russia with a Novichok nerve agent. We seek clarity from the Russian authorities on what transpired and we demand those responsible be brought to justice.

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention. Infectious diseases have a unique ability to paralyze the planet and cause unparalleled, whole-of-society impacts. We must continue to guard against biological threats and improve the functioning of the Convention.

Outer Space Security is another important area for the Conference to address. That includes consideration of an agreement to ban anti-satellite weapons tests that produce space debris.

Finally, Canada is concerned by advances in artificial intelligence technology and automation. These are changing the nature of warfare and spurring concern about the future deployment of autonomous weapons systems. We believe such systems must have appropriate human involvement, and that the development or use of fully autonomous weapons systems is unacceptable.

These are Canada's key disarmament priorities, and they are supported by more than mere words. Canada's Weapons Threat Reduction Program is our flagship contribution to the Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction. Through it, we have delivered more than \$1.5 billion to support projects around the world. These projects combat the threats posed by chemical, biological and nuclear weapons, and support the implementation of the conventional weapon agreements.

Of course, ensuring peace and international security is not the responsibility of any one state. Nor can any one state guarantee it. This is a collective enterprise – one in all our interests – and it requires purpose, patience and persistence. This ought to be our shared goal, given the rewards of success. The existential stakes could not be higher: not just individual human lives but our very survival on this planet. But we have not yet seen a sharpening of political will equal to what is at risk. Canada will continue to dedicate itself to negotiated multilateral solutions in the Conference on Disarmament and elsewhere.