Statement by Canada – General Debate

Delivered by H.E. Leslie Norton
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Chair

On behalf of Canada, I would like to thank you for presiding over this committee - you have the full support of my delegation. As we collectively navigate the second year of this pandemic, we appreciate more than ever the complexity and interconnectivity of the world in which we live. The pandemic continues to shine a light on the necessity of cooperation, harmonized policy and partnerships for human survival.

The development of effective COVID-19 vaccines under unprecedented timelines proves that countries can solve an urgent, global problem. We must leverage the lessons learned in global cooperation to address the range of international security and disarmament problems that have long posed a grave threat to humanity.

Allow me to take this opportunity to highlight the issues that require immediate attention.

It is a profound detriment to the international community and to all of humanity that so little progress has been made towards global nuclear disarmament. Until we reach our nuclear disarmament goals, we must actively reduce their risk of use. To this end, we welcome the extension of the New START treaty and the announcement of a strategic dialogue between the Russian Federation and the United States. However, more needs to be done.

For its part, Canada will work towards a meaningful outcome at the upcoming Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. This includes continued advocacy on two practical steps towards a world free from nuclear weapons - halting the production of fissile materials and banning nuclear weapons testing.

Canada is pleased to present a resolution during this committee to commence the negotiations of a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty. We will also continue to advocate the entry-into-force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. Furthermore, Canada encourages universal adherence to International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards and to key international nuclear security instruments.
Adherence to key international agreements on conventional weapons advance stability and cooperation, and actively protects civilians from armed conflict. Canada encourages all States that have not yet done so to join the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and its Protocols, the Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention, the Convention on Cluster Munitions, and the Arms Trade Treaty.

The widespread disruption caused by COVID-19 reinforces the imperative of strengthening global capacity to mitigate all manner of biological threats. Canada is working with partners to counter biological weapons proliferation and to strengthen biosecurity, biorisk management and disease surveillance.

Over 190 States have ratified or acceded to the Chemical Weapons Convention, but challenges remain. Canada is appalled by the repeated use of chemical weapons in Syria and the abhorrent use of Novichok agents in 2018 and 2020. We deplore these acts, and call on the Syrian Arab Republic and the Russian Federation to cooperate fully with the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and comply with their respective obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention. We will continue to work with the majority of States to uphold the global norm against the use of chemical weapons and hold to account those responsible for such attacks.

Canada places great importance on preserving the peaceful and sustainable use of outer space for all nations. We welcome the development of international norms of responsible behavior in space, including the establishment of an Open-Ended Working Group proposed in the Reducing Space Threats through Norms resolution. We also see merit in exploring a possible agreement to end anti-satellite weapons tests that cause space debris.

We are also faced with the challenges posed by emerging weapons technology, including autonomous weapons systems. These systems raise ethical and legal issues that require greater understanding. Canada supports the continued work of the Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems. We believe that this Group should advance international efforts to ensure these weapons retain adequate human control.
Online activity during the pandemic has demonstrated the vulnerability of individuals, businesses and governments to cybersecurity risks. International cooperation is needed to promote and protect a free, open and secure cyberspace. Canada is pleased that the 2019-21 UN Open Ended Working Group adopted a final consensus report on cybersecurity and welcomes the UN Group of Governmental Experts reports, also agreed by consensus.

Chair, in conclusion, I wish to emphasize the profound value of integrating diverse perspectives in the international security and disarmament fora. For the multilateral initiatives developed in First Committee to be truly effective and sustainable, we must meaningfully integrate diverse perspectives.

As we begin our work as a committee, Canada would like to reference our permanent mission in New York’s public gender pledge. We would like to emphasize our continued commitment to ensuring that our work is conducted in an inclusive and respectful manner in both formal and informal meetings and know we can count on your support.

Let the lessons learned over the past two years of the pandemic guide our work in this committee. Together, we can rise to meet the challenges we face and forge a safer, more secure world.

Thank you.