

Nuclear disarmament must be a priority for the next Canadian government

By PAUL MEYER AND CESAR JARAMILLO SEPTEMBER 16, 2021 *THE HILL TIMES*

If Canada wants to be more than just a back-row supporter of nuclear disarmament it will need to invest some diplomatic energy in this endeavour.



Organized by the Ottawa Committee for Nuclear Disarmament, demonstrators, pictured Dec. 5, 2016, on the Hill. Canada should help heal the rift between TPNW supporters and opponents by attending as an observer the first meeting of TPNW states parties slated to be held in Vienna March 22-24, 2022. Such participation would be a welcome sign of engagement with fellow NPT states which have adopted a different route to fulfill the nuclear disarmament obligation, write Paul Meyer and Cesar Jaramillo. *The Hill Times photograph by Sam Garcia*

Much like the global climate emergency, the continued existence of nuclear weapons constitutes a clear and present threat to human civilization. But if the topics being addressed by party leaders and platforms during this federal election are any indication, nuclear disarmament would seem to be a non-issue in the Canadian political landscape.

Today nearly 14,000 nuclear weapons remain in existence, many of which are many times more powerful than the ones that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki 76 years ago. An entirely preventable existential threat lingers over humanity. And Ottawa is not doing all it can to address it.

With credentials as a bridge builder in international disputes, Canada is well positioned to tackle some of the challenges faced by the global nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime. Key among them: the chasm that has opened up among the 191 states, party to the cornerstone Nuclear

Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), that has pitted supporters of the new Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) against its opponents who defend the *status quo*.

The dispute revolves around the best means to achieve the NPT's commitment to nuclear disarmament. The TPNW stipulates a comprehensive prohibition on nuclear weapons, including not just the threat or use of such weapons, but their very possession. Its opponents favour a "step-by-step" approach to realizing the vaguely phrased NPT commitment to pursue "good faith negotiations on effective measures relating to the cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament."

Since the TPNW's more stringent requirements would proscribe continued support for nuclear deterrence (i.e., the threat to use nuclear weapons under certain unspecified conditions), the nuclear weapon states party to the NPT and their allies (including Canada) have, to date, rejected the TPNW. Critically, Canada continues to embrace NATO's nuclear deterrence policy as a legitimate security doctrine, effectively legitimizing the weapons of its nuclear-armed allies.

The disagreement over the TPNW has put additional stress on the NPT which is already in the diplomatic equivalent of an ICU. Its last Review Conference in 2015 failed to produce an outcome and its 2020 iteration, postponed repeatedly, is now scheduled for January 2022.

Limiting the global nuclear regime has seen major setbacks recently with all five nuclear weapon states engaged in multi-billion dollar "modernization" of their nuclear forces, the dismantlement of arms control agreements, paralysis of multilateral disarmament forums and increased sabre rattling by nuclear armed powers.

Canada is participating in the "Stockholm initiative for Nuclear Disarmament" a grouping of 16 non-nuclear weapon states launched by the Swedish foreign minister in June 2019, which has held four ministerial meetings. The initiative has endorsed 22 "stepping stones" relating to nuclear disarmament and has submitted a working paper to the next NPT meeting. These "stones" are generally light-weight and mainly a repackaging of commitments agreed to at past NPT meetings, but there is potential to do more with this grouping of states.

We see three near-term steps that Canada could take to demonstrate leadership on this challenging issue.

First, Canada should help heal the rift between TPNW supporters and opponents by attending, as an observer, the first meeting of TPNW states parties (currently 55) slated to be held in Vienna March 22-24, 2022. Such participation would be a welcome sign of engagement with fellow NPT states which have adopted a different route to fulfill the nuclear disarmament obligation.

Second, Canada should advocate for the inclusion in the Stockholm Initiative package, support for a “No First Use” declaration on the part of nuclear weapon states. Such a step would help counter a destabilizing (and proliferation-friendly) expansion of rationales for the use of nuclear weapons on the part of some nuclear states. It would also be timely given the favourable attitude towards such an adjustment of policy expressed earlier by President Joe Biden and the resumption of strategic stability talks between the U.S. and Russia.

Third, Canada should elevate its involvement in the Stockholm Initiative, including participating in the meetings at the ministerial level. Such engagement on the part of Foreign Minister Marc Garneau could be coupled with an invitation by Canada to host a meeting of the group this fall to prepare for the NPT Review Conference.

If Canada wants to be more than just a back-row supporter of nuclear disarmament it will need to invest some diplomatic energy in this endeavour. A contribution along the lines of those suggested above would be a good place for the next Canadian government to start.

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