



**Keynote Address at Canadian Parliamentary Forum
On Nuclear Disarmament**

By

Angela Kane

High Representative for Disarmament Affairs



Parliamentary Forum

Co-sponsored by
Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament
And
Canadians for a Nuclear Weapons Convention

Ottawa, Canada
3 December 2013

Ambassador Heinbecker, distinguished Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen.

It is always a pleasure to visit Ottawa—the capital of a country well known for its commitment to nuclear disarmament, and one of the world’s leading supporters of the United Nations. Your commitment has been reflected in the dedicated actions of your diplomats, parliamentarians, and other political leaders. Yet it also extends to the people of Canada and is quite apparent in the activities of a broad network of non-governmental groups.

Without intending any invidious distinctions here, I wish to commend in particular our hosts today—Canadians for a Nuclear Weapon Convention and the Canadian branch of Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (PNND)—for their many initiatives in this field.

When I reflect on Canada’s contributions to global nuclear disarmament, I think of a great bridge with two roadways—much like our George Washington bridge back in New York.

The first of these roads connects government with civil society. It symbolizes a meeting of minds, so to speak, in terms of a shared understanding and commitment to the goal of achieving a world free of nuclear weapons. In this sense, Parliament has served as a common national forum for articulating and affirming this vision, and sustaining it as a national priority.

The dedicated work of parliamentary leaders like Senator Douglas Roche, Senator Romeo Dallaire, Senator Hugh Segal, and Members of Parliament Hélène Laverdière, Paul Dewar, Bill Siksay, and Blaine Calkins—among many others—has sustained this great parliamentary tradition. They, in turn, have worked closely with effective advocates from civil society of the stature of Murray Thomson, Ernie Regehr, and countless others who have made important contributions to this great cause of disarmament, but are too numerous for me to list today.

I especially wish to recognize and to welcome today the support voiced by several hundred recipients of the Order of Canada for Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s five-point nuclear disarmament proposal launched in October 2008. In February 2010 he sent a letter appealing to all the world’s parliaments to support the pursuit of nuclear disarmament.

Later that year, unanimous Motions were adopted in Canada’s House of Commons and Senate in support of that proposal. It is clear that the Canadian parliament’s commitment to disarmament has been expressed both in eloquent words and in deeds.

This begs a legitimate question: why should *parliaments* take up this complex and

long-term challenge of global nuclear disarmament when they have so many other issues competing for higher priority attention?

As Secretary-General Ban explained in his letter of 2010:

Parliamentarians and parliaments play a key role in the success of disarmament and non-proliferation efforts. Parliaments support the implementation of treaties and global agreements contributing to the rule of law and promoting adherence to commitments. They adopt legislation that increases transparency and accountability, thus building trust, facilitating verification and creating conditions that are conducive to the further pursuit of disarmament.

The positive response from the Canadian parliament was accompanied by statements and resolutions of support from many other national legislatures as well as the European Parliament. I am both pleased and impressed that parliaments have been taking a greater interest in disarmament. Through a variety of creative initiatives, they are helping to bring both democracy and the rule of law to disarmament. They are exploring new ways to translate pro-disarmament public opinion into opportunities for influencing public policy. And in many ways, the Canadian parliament has been among the leading voices in this field.

In October 2012, your parliament hosted the 127th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in Quebec City, which launched the new PNND/IPU Handbook on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (published in English and French versions). This Handbook is unique. It goes beyond simply identifying disarmament as a worthy goal. It offers practical advice on specific legislative actions to advance this cause. In short, it is helping to bring the lofty goal of nuclear disarmament down to earth, by defining its merits in terms that citizens can easily recognize as serving national and global interests.

What these and other legislative actions are doing is to ensure that solemn national commitments to multilateral norms in disarmament are rooted in a strong foundation at home—in domestic laws, domestic politics, and domestic governmental institutions.

If one road of the great bridge I am describing today links government with the people, the other road links domestic and international policy—and there is abundant evidence to document that these two strands of policy have been well integrated in Canada's longstanding approach to disarmament.

Just as Canada has long played important constructive roles in the periodic five-year Review Conferences of the parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), so too will it undoubtedly play a key role leading up to—and at—the next such conference in 2015. We all know that some deep divisions remain among the parties to

that treaty. There is dissatisfaction over the failure to establish a zone in the Middle East free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, over the slow pace of nuclear disarmament, over the fast pace of nuclear-weapon modernization, and over the growing disparity between ever-more stringent non-proliferation controls coupled with a more *laissez faire* approach to nuclear disarmament.

I must say that the growing concerns worldwide over the humanitarian consequences of the use of nuclear weapons provide a foundation for future progress in disarmament. But this development need not be limited just to nuclear weapons. The horrific uses of chemical weapons in Syria this year have galvanized world opinion behind the global taboo on both the use and possession of such weapons.

This growing consensus is bringing the Chemical Weapons Convention very close to full universal membership. The treaty already has 190 states parties, more than any other non-proliferation or disarmament agreement—by comparison, the UN Charter itself has 193 parties. This is an enormously significant development, one that I believe has largely been due to an abhorrence deeply held both in government and civil society about the humanitarian consequences of using such weapons.

I see this growing public interest in viewing such weapons through the lens of their humanitarian effects as not at all limited just to WMD. Indeed, throughout the negotiations of an Arms Trade Treaty at the United Nations, delegation after delegation pointed to the terrible burdens created by an unregulated international arms market on social and economic development around the world. This trade has prolonged and aggravated civil wars. Women and children have typically been their victims in numbers that boggle the mind. These weapons have also been acquired by criminal groups and terrorists.

Yet, as has been the case with indiscriminate WMD, we see a strong humanitarian interest motivating efforts to curtail such atrocities. As parliamentarians, you have already recognized that this is a tremendously significant development—it offers hope for future progress across the board in addressing both WMD and conventional arms issues. It also bodes well for the future development of the rule of law in all these areas.

Now, we are well aware of the many obstacles blocking progress, especially in nuclear disarmament. And we know that overcoming these political and psychological obstacles will not be easy. Success will require sustained efforts both inside and outside governments, and I know parliaments will continue to make their own contributions to the political process in debating specific initiatives, setting priorities, representing the views of their constituents, and making relevant budgetary decisions.

Despite many differences that remain between parliaments around the world, I do see some considerable potential for this humanitarian approach to disarmament and

conventional arms control as an auspicious means to reconcile those differences. No single political party has a monopoly on defining the public conscience when it comes to the humanitarian effects of these weapons—recognition of our common humanity offers a strong foundation indeed for collective action across party lines to respond to all of these weapons challenges.

Of all the various multilateral standards, one of the most important is for disarmament and conventional arms control to have the force of law. And here I believe parliaments, even without engaging in treaty negotiations themselves, have very important contributions to make in building the case that progress in these fields must have a strong foundation in domestic and international law. Canadian parliamentarians have long shared with their other legislative colleagues in the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) a deep appreciation of this fact.

The support that has been voiced both here and in the IPU for the negotiation of a Nuclear Weapons Convention or a framework of agreements with a similar aim is fully consistent with the multilateral obligation—found in the NPT and reinforced by Security Council resolution 1887 (2009)—to undertake negotiations in good faith on nuclear disarmament.

How fitting and impressive it is that the lawmakers of the world—despite the abundance of other issues of pressing concern to their local constituencies—would be devoting such effort to bringing the rule of law to disarmament. You have understood well how progress in this field would not only make citizens everywhere more safe and secure—it would also enable the rational allocation of financial and technical resources to address basic human needs for social and economic development.

So in conclusion, I thank all of you who have devoted such time and effort to advancing this great cause, and wish you every success as you continue the struggle over the years ahead. You are acting as responsible custodians not only of the interests of your constituents today, but also those of future generations to come. Please accept my deepest respects and gratitude for all you have already accomplished. I am honoured to be in your company today, and am reassured that together we will see new progress in achieving disarmament goals that will yield a more secure and prosperous world for all.