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STATEMENT BY

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TO

THE FIRST COMMITTEE OF THE FIFTY-NINTH SESSION OF
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE UNITED NATIONS

NEW YORK, 4 OCTOBER 2004

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DÉCLARATION DE  
MONSIEUR PAUL MEYER  
AMBASSADEUR POUR LE DÉSARMEMENT

À  
LA PREMIÈRE COMMISSION  
DE LA CINQUANTE-NEUVIÈME SESSION  
DE L'ASSEMBLÉE GÉNÉRALE DES NATIONS UNIES

NEW YORK, LE 4 OCTOBRE 2004

Mr Chairman,

Please accept my warmest congratulations on your election and the assurance of our delegation's support in making this a fruitful session.

Canada values this annual gathering of those engaged in the disarmament and security diplomacy of their respective states as a manifestation of the universal concern and commitment to ensure a peaceful and secure world. We are aware that major threats to that objective remain and have the potential in some cases to negate overnight the socio-economic accomplishments of decades, let alone exact a toll of human life that is inconceivable. As an international community, we have made great strides in developing common norms of behaviour and in eradicating entire categories of weapons of mass destruction. We have concluded comprehensive prohibitions on biological and chemical weapons, adopted a new protocol (Explosive Remnants of War) to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) and have been working progressively to reduce and finally eliminate nuclear weapons: the ultimate arm of indiscriminate mass destruction.

The non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament enterprise is both a complex and collective one. It is complex in its subject matter and inter-dependencies, and it is collective in that its effectiveness rests on the ability of all member states to respect and uphold its obligations. We continue to believe that the best way of dealing with contemporary security threats is through multilateral cooperation premised on the rule of law. Legally binding agreements equipped with robust verification provisions that afford a high degree of assurance that any non-compliance will be detected, remain, in our estimation, the preferred means for consolidating advances on the non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament front. Reflecting the importance we ascribe to verification, we will be proposing during this First Committee the establishment in 2006 of a Panel of government experts to consider and report in the same year concerning the issue of verification, the 16 principles and the appropriate UN role therein. We believe the international community can benefit from the results of such expert reflection, which we would hope will serve to identify practical steps to enhance the role of verification in the conduct of our work.

The disarmament agenda over the next year is a full one, and we are conscious of the wide significance that upcoming events like the 2004 Nairobi Summit on a Mine Free World (the initial Review Conference for the Ottawa Convention), the May NPT Review Conference and the June Biennial Meeting on Small Arms and Light Weapons will have for the subject matter of this Committee's work. In this regard, we heartily welcome the efforts of reform underway to ensure greater relevancy for the work of the First Committee and meshing better its results with the objectives of the principal treaties in the disarmament field and the activities pursuant to them, as well as with other work that is taking place. The universal nature of the First Committee membership gives a unique status to its discussions and decisions. We need to extract maximum value from its annual session.

In this context, we support, in practice as in word, the desire to confine general debate to the initial week of the session and to devote the time thus saved to the subject specific discussion of the thematic debate. We hope that through a structured discussion delegations could address the substance of the chief disarmament-related topics before the Committee. Issues such as outer space, verification and compliance, the FMCT, the state of progress in nuclear disarmament, small arms and light weapons; and disarmament education, to cite just a few, could benefit from a focussed exchange of views that could serve to inform subsequent action by the Committee in terms of resolutions or decisions. We would also welcome more interactivity in such sessions and the inclusion of lead-off speakers drawn from the ranks of leading representatives or experts of concerned organisations. In our opinion, such a coherent consideration of prominent topics could yield substantial, policy relevant results and help the Committee consider forward-looking initiatives, something which is not necessarily obtainable from the frequently formalistic processing of Committee resolutions.

The Canadian delegation is prepared to contribute actively and substantively to such a revitalised debate and we would urge other delegations to express their views on issues which are of importance to them. In this way, we think the Committee's deliberations can once again generate the sort of "value added" that will ensure its central place in the UN's disarmament machinery.

Thank you