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On International Affairs / Sur les affaires internationales

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Comments by Peggy Mason upon Receipt of the CNWC 2016 Achievement Award Oct. 24, 2016.

Rt. Honourable Joe Clark and Maureen McTeer, Excellencies, Members of the Order of Canada, dear Friends and Colleagues

Thank you so much to [Canadians for a Nuclear Weapons Convention](#) for this very great honour. I am very humbled when I think of earlier recipients beginning with the inaugural presentation to Murray Thomson, as well as of so many others in this room who have dedicated so much of their lives to this cause. Murray Thomson takes the cake on that one, of course – how many years, Murray?

I do not want to make a long speech, especially after a full day of excellent panel discussions at the Seminar hosted by the Canadian Network to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (CNANW) entitled: [“Building Momentum for Nuclear Disarmament”](#).

But I cannot help briefly reflecting that my very first international conference was the opening of the [Stockholm Conference on Confidence and Security Building Measures in January 1984](#). The tradition then – an important one reflecting the cross party support for arms control – was that the Foreign Minister be accompanied by a Parliamentary Delegation from all parties: [Paul McCrae](#) for the Liberals, the indomitable [Pauline Jewett](#) for the NDP, and [Former Prime Minister Joe Clark](#) for the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada. Mr. Clark was the new PC Arms Control critic and I accompanied him.

This was deep in the Cold war and all the East/West arms control negotiations, nuclear and conventional, had broken down. Over 2000 journalists converged on Stockholm because of the mere possibility that the Soviet and American Foreign Ministers would meet, such was the concern and media interest. It was this very same concern that had propelled then Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau to launch his [“Five Continent Peace Initiative”](#) which Joe Clark had convinced then PC Leader Brian Mulroney to support. Reducing nuclear tensions was just too important for partisan politics to stand in the way.

Today, once again, there are no nuclear or conventional talks ongoing between Russia and the USA; tensions are high and getting higher. Nuclear weapons modernization programmes are underway in all 9 of the nuclear-armed states, with the trillion dollar American programme dwarfing all the rest and Russia coming in second at \$70 billion dollars.

But the difference now, astoundingly, is that there is a virtual media dead zone when it comes to this new nuclear weapons build up, except in reference to accusations against Russia or North Korea (or Iran before the nuclear deal), but with almost no mention at all of the American build

up, which includes new so-called [tactical nuclear weapons](#) slated for Europe. These weapons are designed to be more precise and lower in explosive yield than the current nuclear gravity bombs based in 5 NATO countries. As I said today at the CNANW conference, these are exactly the characteristics – more precision and lower yield - that caused the US Congress to ban their development in the past. They create “the illusion of usability” when the reality is that any use of nuclear weapons would be catastrophic.

Yet now, as I said, there is almost no comment in the media about this dangerous development. This reflects a lack of expertise in the media, symptomatic of a broader problem as they struggle to adjust to the new digital media landscape.

So we have our work cut out for us!

And that is why the meeting today of the Canadian Network to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (CNANW) is so timely and important. It was a meeting of NGO’s, academic experts, serving and former diplomats and at least one official from Global Affairs Canada. We as civil society are exploring ways to try and convince the Canadian government to resume a prominent role in helping move us away from the new nuclear brink. This is a role we used to see under previous Liberal and Progressive Conservative governments. It is my hope that this annual award will help bring more attention to the urgent task of shifting away from the dead end of militarism, whether nuclear or conventional, toward sustainable peace and common security.

Let me end on that note – common security, as envisaged in the UN Charter, calls for the equal security of all states. Yet it is all too rare in media coverage today to be given the perspectives and concerns of the other side. That change alone would be a huge step forward.

Thank you.