PRESS STATEMENT:

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OUTER SPACE AND DISARMAMENT

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Before the present United Nations session which the Minister for External Affairs, Sir Garfield Barwick, has been attending, the great powers and other nations were meeting together at Geneva discussing disarmament. This is nothing new. Disarmament discussions have been going on for as long as most of us can remember and no success has been achieved. However, the great and pressing need for disarmament is no less urgent now than it was when the discussions first began many years ago. Indeed, I would say that the need for controlled disarmament is greater now than it has ever been. The reason for this is plain. The two great powers in the world, the United States and Russia, are fast conquering outer space. Unless agreements are made to control arms on earth, I cannot see how the western world can prevent the Soviet from ultimately using outer space for military purposes. At the present moment, I don't think any country has the techniques to do this, but at the current rate of space development in Russia and in the United States it will surely not be long before our knowledge of outer space and our ability to master the problems involved will make it possible for this new and alien sphere to be used in a military fashion. For this reason the failure of the last Disarmament Conference is all the more depressing.

From time to time the Russians have come forward with vast and bold propaganda proposals for complete disarmament over a period of, say 4 years. The West has never been able to accept the Russian proposals as they stood for the simple reason that there has never been any element of inspection or control in the Russian proposals. How can we know that they are going to disarm unless there is some impartial observer who can check all parties to see that disarmament is in fact taking place? The Russians have looked upon any form of inspection as an excuse to spy in Russian territory. Therefore the Russians have never accepted inspection or control. Because of this, disarmament proposals have so far failed. However, the West has been particularly keen to break down this Russian resistance to the vital elements of inspection and control, and has therefore constantly put forward counter proposals and taken initiatives of its own to try and meet Russian objections without violating Western security. So far, the United States and the United Kingdom have had no success.

Disarmament discussions have centred very largely over the questions of nuclear and atomic weapons because it is recognised by all the great powers that the use of these weapons present the world with an increasing and continuous danger of annihilation. However, the Russians have maintained their objections in this field as they have in the general field. They will have no inspection and no control.

The Western world has devoted its scientific resources towards trying to overcome this. In recent years, the West has developed instruments of such great sensitivity that they would be able to detect any surface or above the ground atomic or nuclear explosion in Russia without having inspection posts on Russian or Communist soil. This advance in the scientific field made it possible for the West to offer to sign a Test Ban Treaty with the Russians without on-site inspections. However, the West has not yet got instruments sensitive enough to distinguish underground atomic tests and nuclear tests from earthquakes and some inspection would have been necessary to detect Russian underground tests or to see that they were not conducting tests underground.
At the recent discussions the United Kingdom and the United States therefore put forward two proposals - the first was that there should be a complete ban on all atmospheric and outer space tests of nuclear weapons without any inspection. The other proposal that the West put forward involved underground tests, and this did provide for on site inspections which would be necessary to make sure that any agreement of this kind was being kept. Without any discussion, without apparent thought, within minutes of the proposals being tabled, the Russian representative rejected both proposals out of hand. This was a depressing exhibition. Increased scientific and technical knowledge had made it possible for the United Kingdom and the United States to make significant concessions to the Russians in the field of inspection. Inspection was no longer necessary for above ground tests. At the very least, one would have thought that the Russians would say they would consider these proposals and examine them and perhaps suggest amendments. They would have done this if they had any genuine desire for disarmament in any field. They did not do this. They rejected both proposals out of hand, even though one of the proposals answered all the previous objections which they had had in relation to a nuclear test ban for which the United States and the United Kingdom have been working for many years.

We can be certain that the United States and the United Kingdom will continue to work for disarmament and will continue to work for a sensible and workable Test Ban Treaty so far as nuclear weapons are concerned. However, there can be little hope with the current stage of Communist thinking that the Western negotiators will have any success.

The Russian action will, I believe, have significant effect on the views of neutral nations, or nations that have had a significantly independent attitude in relation to the East-West struggle, such as India. There are now neutral nations who meet with the great powers to discuss these disarmament problems on a Committee of the United Nations. The draft proposals that were put forward by the United States and the United Kingdom met United Nations specifications and they must have impressed the neutral countries by their sincerity and by the way in which they had done so much to meet previous Russian objections. The off-hand Russian rejection of these proposals must surely have done something to damage Russian prestige with these countries.