

Article VI Forum Ottawa Meeting
Opening Address

By Hon. Douglas Roche, O.C.
Chairman, Middle Powers Initiative

Ottawa, September 28, 2006

It is a special pleasure for me to welcome the participants in the Article VI Forum to my own country of Canada. I wish you a very pleasant stay and assure you that MPI will do everything we can to ensure your comfort.

At the outset, I want to express the deep appreciation of the Middle Powers Initiative to the Government of Canada for the excellent support we have received, and particularly for the great assistance and courtesy given by the officers of the Foreign Affairs Department. It is an honour to have Foreign Minister Peter MacKay address us.

The Article VI Forum is approaching its first anniversary. We began October 3, 2005 with a meeting of invited States at the United Nations in New York, where the Forum was cited as an example of new and creative thinking. A second meeting was convened at The Hague on March 2-3, 2006 to examine the legal, technical and political requirements for a nuclear weapons-free world, and I said at the conclusion that the enthusiasm of the government representatives gave us the confidence to proceed with this process. Now we meet in Ottawa to examine five priority measures: a Fissile Materials Cut-off Treaty; verification of reduction and elimination of nuclear arsenals; reduction of the operational status of nuclear forces; the

Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty; and strengthening assurances of non-use of nuclear weapons against non-weapon States.

We would like to give a special welcome to the representatives of the nuclear weapons States Parties to the NPT who have joined us today to engage in a dialogue on these technical issues. It is important for all of us to develop understanding of the perspectives and security needs of States.

The agenda of the Article VI Forum is both substantive and hopeful. But it is not complacent. MPI has very much in mind the recent warning of U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan that the international community appears to be “sleepwalking” towards a possible nuclear catastrophe.

We are heartened by the report of the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission, and endorse the Commission’s analysis and recommendations. Hans Blix, whose lecture in this building we were proud to sponsor last night, is warning the world that the stocks of 27,000 nuclear weapons remain “extraordinarily and alarmingly high.” We support his call for the commencement of “preparations for a World Summit on disarmament, non-proliferation and terrorist use of weapons of mass destruction to generate new momentum for concerted international action.” Perhaps the Article VI Forum, which draws together representatives from key middle power States,

can help stimulate world concern that new action must be taken by the highest levels of governments.

We began out of the crisis of the 2005 NPT Review Conference trying to find a way around the institutional and procedural deadlocks that beset the nuclear disarmament agenda. The Middle Powers Initiative sincerely believes that, with the stakes for humanity so high, there must be progress. Middle power countries, working in a non-adversarial environment, and focusing on goals for which there is virtual agreement, can and must build a framework to repair the non-proliferation regime. Our faith in the rule of law, multilateral cooperation, and the call of necessity inspires confidence that disaster is not inevitable and success is possible.

The Article VI Forum is precisely focused on paving the way to a successful 2010 NPT Review Conference. MPI takes the view that the NPT cannot withstand two successive failed review conferences. Thus we seek to influence the preparatory process to ensure that political agreement on basic items can be reached to fulfill commitments to “systematic and progressive” nuclear disarmament.

In the Article VI Forum, we combine long-range vision and short-term practicalities. Our work can truly move the world to safety and true human security. I wish us all well as we continue in this vital endeavour.