

## **Press Release**

### **Motion to De-alert Nuclear Weapons**

**September 7, 1999**

Senator, Douglas Roche, Chair, Canadian Pugwash introduced a Motion in the Senate of Canada called on the Government to urge all nuclear powers to de-alert their nuclear weapons as soon as possible. He has also noted growing concern that the Y2K problem could infect command, control, communication and intelligence systems of nuclear forces.

A Motion calling on the Government of Canada to urge all nuclear powers to de-alert their nuclear weapons as soon as possible was introduced in the Senate of Canada September 7, 1999 by Senator Douglas Roche.

There are currently 5,000 nuclear weapons on hair-trigger alert, meaning they could be fired within minutes. Taking these weapons off alert status would be done by physically separating the warheads from the delivery vehicles.

The motion is aimed at the five declared nuclear weapons States, the United States, Russia, the U.K., France and China and the three nuclear weapons capable States, India, Pakistan and Israel. "These powerful States could make a great gift to humanity for the new Millennium by removing the possibility of nuclear accidents," Senator Roche said.

Senator Roche noted growing concern that the failure of computers to recognize the year 2000 date change could infect command, control, communication and intelligence systems of nuclear forces. However, he said, "the Motion is not directly dependent on the Y2K problem. The year 2000 date change highlights the existing danger to the world because of the ongoing alert status of nuclear forces." Several incidents of false signals of missile attacks have triggered a process in which national leaders had to decide in only a few minutes whether to fire nuclear weapons.

Russia and the United States are now discussing a proposed joint center in the U.S. which would seat a handful of U.S. and Russian officers side-by-side for a few days during the 2000 date switch to monitor blips on nuclear screens. The officers would be in direct touch with their respective national command authorities to alleviate any concern about blips that may occur on the date change. "This shows that the U.S. and Russia are concerned about a possible problem," Senator Roche said, "but their response is inadequate. The world needs the safety that de-alerting would ensure -- not just on New Year's Eve but throughout every day of every year."

Senator Roche noted that the U.K. government has relaxed the notice to fire its nuclear weapons from minutes to days. Also, the Government of Canada, following the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, supports the concept of de-alerting and other measures which contribute to the safety and security of nuclear arsenals and the stability of U.S.-Russian strategic nuclear relations.

Senator Roche's Motion reads: "That the Senate recommends that the Government of Canada urge the nuclear weapons States plus India, Pakistan and Israel to take all of their nuclear forces off alert status as soon as possible."