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NOBEL PEACE PRIZE

Statement by:

The Honourable Yuen Pau Woo

Tuesday, December 12, 2017

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Hon. Yuen Pau Woo: Honourable colleagues, yesterday marked the sixtieth anniversary of Lester B. Pearson receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo, Norway. He remained the only Canadian to receive the peace prize until this year when, just two days ago, Canadian peace activist and Hiroshima survivor Setsuko Thurlow received the same honour on behalf of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons.

Pearson was awarded the 1957 Nobel Prize for his contribution to the end of the Suez Canal crisis. In his capacity at the time as Canada's Minister of External Affairs and representative to the United Nations, he initiated a resolution for the establishment of the UN Emergency Force — the first-large scale international peacekeeping mission in a conflict zone and a foundation stone for the establishment of the modern-day Blue Berets of the UN.

His contribution to international peacekeeping, and the recognition that came with a Nobel Peace Prize, launched Canada's reputation as a major contributor to UN peacekeeping and a leader in conflict resolution. Over the years, our self-image as a global peacekeeper has grown larger than the "boots on the ground" would warrant. But peacekeeping today is more than boots on the ground, and it is appropriate that the government is recalibrating Canada's contribution to the UN in both quantitative and qualitative terms.

Even so, it is unlikely that Canada will ever return to its leadership position as an international peacekeeper, at least not in the conventional sense of material contributions to peacekeeping operations. Which is why the significance for Canada of Lester Pearson's Nobel Lecture on December 11, 1957, rests not so much on his advocacy for UN peacekeeping but on his broader ideas about peacemaking in the world. Entitled "The Four Faces

of Peace," Pearson's lecture rings true even today. His warning against erecting barriers to trade is as relevant now as it was in the late 1950s. He said:

... excessive economic nationalism, erecting its reactionary barriers to the international division of labor, is far more anomalous and irrational now than it was when the enlightened minds of the nineteenth century preached against it and for a time succeeded in having practiced what they preached.

Pearson was a champion of diplomacy in resolving international conflicts — not based on a naive belief in its efficacy, but from a sober recognition that the alternatives were too wretched to contemplate. He was referring to the Cold War in his Oslo speech, but are circumstances today, with nuclear weapons under the control of rogue leaders, much different?

Yet even diplomacy is not enough. Pearson recognized that lasting peace is not about patched-over differences and grudging compromises; it is about the mutual empathy that comes from a deep understanding of the other side and the long-term investment that has to go into developing such mutual understanding.

He said in 1957:

How can there be peace without people understanding each other, and how can this be if they don't know each other?

These lines were the inspiration for Pearson College United World College of the Pacific in Victoria, which was established in 1973 and which stands arguably as the most enduring of the former Prime Minister's legacies. If Canada is to reinvent its role in international peacekeeping, a good place to start would be a rereading of our former Prime Minister's Nobel Peace Prize speech. There are indeed multiple faces of peace, and Canada should look to every one of them.
