



Canada: Baird confirms boycott of UN disarmament conference

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Minister of Foreign Affairs John Baird speaks to reporters in the Foyer of the House of Commons on Parliament Hill in Ottawa on Tuesday, July 5, 2011. (Sean Kilpatrick / THE CANADIAN PRESS)

Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird says Canada will boycott a North Korean-chaired UN disarmament conference. Baird also said that a move to recognize a Palestinian state in the General Assembly this fall is meaningless.

The comments Monday seem to signal that the newly elected majority government will take a tougher approach with foreign policy.

Baird said that a future vote over Palestinian statehood at the main UN body won't serve any purpose except to create a public relations event. And he added that a Security Council vote would be needed.

"We think it's distinctly unhelpful to seek a public-relations declaration within the UN General Assembly. Obviously, it would be without any meaning," Baird said Monday.

"We believe that statehood should be the product of a negotiated permanent peace with security for both the Palestinian and Israeli people."

Baird's comments on both the Palestinian question and the UN disarmament conference are consistent with the Conservative government's international positions.

"Canada has taken strong, principled stands with respect to supporting liberal democracies, and with respect to this issue," he said.

"There has been certainly a change under the leadership of Prime Minister Stephen Harper, and I certainly wouldn't see us changing on that regard."

Baird also told reporters in a conference call that it is "absurd and ridiculous" that North Korea is leading the Conference on Disarmament.

The United Nations Conference on Disarmament has 65 members, including both Canada and North Korea. Each of the member states rotate through the presidency.

Baird said Canada will resume its participation in the conference when North Korea's term ends on Aug. 19.

In a separate statement issued Monday afternoon, Baird said the North Korean regime "is a major proliferator of nuclear weapons and its non-compliance with its disarmament obligations goes against the fundamental principles of this committee. This undermines the integrity of both the disarmament framework and the UN. Canada will not be party to that."

The Washington Post

US sees no damage NKorea can cause as rotating chair of UN disarmament body

Associated Press, 11 July 2011

WASHINGTON — The U.S. has no plans to make a big deal of North Korea becoming the new head of a global disarmament body.

North Korea's four-week tenure as head of the 65-nation Conference on Disarmament begins this month. It's a rotating appointment and State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland called the news "inconsequential." She said Monday that the U.S. doesn't see any damage that North Korea can cause by its role in the consensus-based organization.

Canadian press reports say Canada plans to boycott the conference during North Korea's tenure.

Nuland said the U.S. is concentrating its disarmament efforts through the P5-plus-one, or the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council and Germany.

The conference has been stalemated since it wrote the nuclear test ban treaty in 1996.