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P R E S S S E R V I C E , S E R V I C E D E P R E S S E

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STATEMENT FOR SECRETARY GENERAL'S PRE-MINISTERIAL PRESS CONFERENCE

I shall speak briefly because you will wish to have as much time as possible for questions. But I should like to make a few remarks about the setting, as I see it, of this Ottawa Ministerial meeting, and about some of the main issues with which I expect Ministers to deal.

The past six months, since Ministers last met in Brussels, have not been an easy time in many ways. We have seen many political changes. We have been confronting an energy crisis which is probably the precursor of a broader and longer term problem of less readily available and more costly natural resources for all the developed countries.

We have learnt, if we still needed to learn, how much patience and persistence is going to be needed if the process of East-West negotiations is to continue successfully. Thus we have seen how difficult are some of the problems in Geneva in the CSCE - problems of human contacts and freer flow of information; how far apart we still are in the MBFR negotiations, particularly on the concept of "balanced" reductions; how much still remains to be done before a second SALT agreement can be reached.

But in several ways I think that we are in better shape than six months ago. There has been progress in the dangerous Middle East situation in which the efforts of the US Secretary of State have played such an important part. There has been no repetition of the kind of East-West confrontation to which that situation gave rise last October. The issues which then arose within the Alliance about the scope of Alliance responsibility and the adequacy, or inadequacy of Alliance consultation have been tackled, and there is now much closer understanding on these matters. There has also been much progress on other problems of Atlantic Relations. Views have been moderated and such differences as remain are much less sharply defined than a little while ago.

That then is the background. At this meeting, Ministers will want to look both at the prospects for future progress in East-West negotiations, and at the domestic concerns of the Alliance. There will be quite a few new faces representing new governments at the meeting. Their views will be of particular interest.

It is no secret that in the period since the last Ministerial meeting, the Permanent Council has carried work on an Atlantic statement very near to completion. Ministers will be considering that and, in doing so, a whole range of underlying issues such as the evolution of the security problems of the countries of the Alliance in a changing world, the continuing and future role of the Alliance, the scope of the interests and concerns of the Alliance and the question of Alliance consultation.

The adoption of an Atlantic statement setting the future course of the Alliance in the light of the fresh challenges of a rapidly changing world will mark a major step, and will be evidence of the continuing strength and vitality of the Alliance.

With regard to East-West relations, Ministers will certainly wish to review all the main areas of East-West negotiations, and in particular to consider those matters where progress is proving difficult. The fact that this meeting comes just before President Nixon is to visit Mr. Brezhnev in Moscow renders it especially important. In addition, at the suggestion of President Nixon, I have, as you know, now invited NATO leaders for an exchange of views and consultations in Brussels on 26th June before the President flies to Moscow. This serves to underline, in the strongest possible way, the emphasis placed on the most thorough Alliance consultation in the present juncture of East-West relations. As Secretary General, I draw great encouragement from this.

This is the 25th Anniversary year of the Alliance. This meeting in Ottawa is not in any sense a celebratory session. The Alliance is a working institution with no special pride in longevity as such. It has a task to do which is not yet done. Ministers will be looking to the future rather than back at the past. But if we do, at some point, raise our glasses to all the successes of the Alliance over the past 25 years, I think we shall be fully justified.

I will not keep you longer by enumerating those successes. Instead, I invite your questions, and afterwards I invite you to take a drink with me.