

The Pugwash legacy: Big things can happen in small places

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The goal of a world free of nuclear weapons has been at the heart of the disarmament agenda, and at the heart of Canadian foreign policy, since the dawn of the nuclear era. In recent years, this goal has been given increasing profile by President Barack Obama and supported by such figures as former U.S. secretaries of state Henry Kissinger and George Shultz, former U.S. defence secretary William Perry, the UN secretary general, and a wide range of influential current and former leaders around the world.

Few Canadians, however, realize what a central role Canada has played in the international campaign to eliminate nuclear weapons. In 1957, a group of 22 distinguished scientists from the Soviet Union, the U.S. and eight other countries met in the small village of Pugwash, Nova Scotia. This historic meeting of scientists from both sides of the Iron Curtain took place due to the generosity of Canadian-born Cyrus Eaton. It was a landmark meeting, one of the first of its kind ever held. It proved that committed individuals can meet and work together, even from across the divide of bitter conflict.

The meeting led to the formation of a new major international movement for disarmament, the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs. This set a path that would eventually lead to the award of a Nobel Peace Prize to the organization and to one of its dynamic founders, Sir Joseph Rotblat.

Today, a ceremony will take place at the home of the Pugwash movement, Cyrus Eaton's Thinkers' Lodge. It will include the unveiling of a plaque marking it as a National Historic Site. Lovingly restored, the Thinkers' Lodge now takes its rightful place in Canadian history.

The Thinkers' Lodge is a symbol not only for the "Pugwash movement" that was born there, but for all those who seek to promote dialogue across political divides on key issues that threaten humanity. The Pugwash movement continues to create a vital space where people can hammer out solutions to some of the thorniest problems in hotspots around the world, including the Middle East and South Asia.

In keeping with the spirit of that first meeting, Pugwash conferences are places where leading figures from societies in conflict can meet; often Pugwash meetings are the only

places where such people can actually meet. Some of these meetings are small, quiet, intimate affairs; others are large, public meetings.

One of the latter was the recent Pugwash Conference held in Berlin, where some 300 current and former policy-makers and other experts from 43 countries gathered, including eight current ministers, four former intelligence chiefs, and several sitting MPs. The Berlin statement of the eminent Pugwash Council reinforces the groundbreaking objectives of that 1957 meeting, which still resonate internationally: "Dialogue is essential if we are to overcome the walls that divide people, countries, religions and ideas. Disarmament — particularly nuclear disarmament, arms control, and military and non-military confidence-building measures are powerful instruments in creating a more peaceful and secure world."

We salute those who supported and worked tirelessly to restore the Thinkers' Lodge and secured its designation as a National Historic Site of Canada. When nuclear weapons are eventually eliminated from this planet, Thinkers' Lodge will represent one of the first steps along that path. For this reason, it has not only local, regional and national significance, but it is also an important global historic site. Canadians have ensured that this icon of hope will continue to inspire future generations.

The commemoration of this world-renowned symbol of peace in this small village proves that big things can happen in small places, and that we all have a role to play in creating a more secure world.

Submitted by: Jayantha Dhanapala, president of the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs and a former Under-Secretary General of the United Nations for Disarmament Affairs; Paolo Cotta Ramusino, Secretary General of the Pugwash Conferences; Adele Buckley and Peter Jones, the Canadian members of the Pugwash Council, the international governing body of the Pugwash Conferences.