

## WATCHING BRIEF WB 16-7: NUCLEAR WEAPONS BAN – SEP 16

*This Brief focusses on moves for a nuclear weapons ban, following stalemate in negotiations towards nuclear disarmament. It highlights the ambivalent position of Australian Governments in responding to such moves because of their reliance on the 'nuclear umbrella' provided by the USA.*

### Nuclear Weapons Threat

There are currently over 15,000 nuclear weapons held around the world. USA and Russia have the most (6970 and 7300 respectively) and others (France, UK, China) have a few hundred each, India and Pakistan just over 100 each, in Israel 80 and North Korea fewer than 10. Some 28 countries (including Australia) either host nuclear weapons on their soil or belong to nuclear alliances.

During the Cold War the doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) was based on the idea that deterrence between the USA and USSR would maintain stability globally. Governments like Australia used this to 'shelter' under the US nuclear status while offering support in principle to nuclear disarmament. In more recent years, there has been frustration among many non-nuclear countries that progress to disarmament has been glacial, and this has led to moves to try different approaches.

The United Nations has been the avenue for a number of formal agreements towards nuclear disarmament:

- A Commission to deal with problems related to the discovery of atomic energy (1946).
- Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (1968).
- Treaty banning Nuclear Weapon Tests in the Atmosphere, in outer space and under water (Partial test Ban Treaty- 1963).
- Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (1996 – still to enter into force).

Reinforcing these agreements are treaties that create nuclear-weapons free zones – banning the use, development and deployment of nuclear weapons:

- Antarctica (1961)
- Outer Space (1967)
- Latin America/Caribbean (1969)
- Seabed (1972)
- South Pacific (1986)
- South East Asia (1997)
- Mongolia (2000)
- African (2009)
- Central Asia (2009)

In 2007 the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) was formed in Vienna, Austria. Three international meetings (Norway, Mexico and Austria) in 2013 and 2014 have developed a **Humanitarian Initiative** – a pledge by many countries to work for a ban on nuclear weapons. The change of focus from national security to the humanitarian threat of nuclear weapons has proved crucial to the emerging support for this. The failure of

the 2015 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) conference to make meaningful progress towards disarmament has reinforced this move.

William Perry, former US Secretary of Defence, is seeking to raise global awareness of the increasing threat of nuclear weapons. In an interview with Phillip Adams on 16 August 2016 (*Late Night Live*, ABC Radio) he warned that we are on the verge of a new nuclear arms race and of drifting back into Cold War mentality because of renewed tension between Russia and the USA. Russia has renounced a 'no first strike' position, and despite President Obama saying he wants to reassert such a position, he is unlikely to do so. William Perry argues that stockpiles can be reduced without compromising security, and that diplomacy is essential to reverse the current trend.

## **Australia's Position**

Dimity Hawkins and Julie Kimber from Swinburne University of Technology have written an article (*The Conversation*, 29 August 2016) which makes the following points:

Australia has changed its approach from Mutually Assured Destruction to Extended Nuclear Deterrence (END). This was initially expressed (1994 Defence White Paper) as an 'interim' change, but by 2016 (Defence White Paper) it had become permanent.

As a result, Australia has a position that (a) does not specify the conditions under which it would accept the 'protection' of nuclear weapons use, and (b) means it will continue to oppose steps towards a ban on nuclear weapons.

US President Obama said in March 2016 that even the USA must "have the courage to escape the logic of fear and pursue a world without them (nuclear weapons)". At the same time the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) calculates that the USA will spend many billions of dollars in the next decade to maintain and enhance its nuclear capability.

In 2009 Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama launch a report by the International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (ICNND). The report was from a panel of 15 members drawn from different countries and led by Gareth Evans and Yoriko Kawaguchi. It made a number of proposals including a Nuclear Weapons Convention, and a phased reduction of nuclear weapons arsenals. The response of many NGOs was that this timetable was too slow.

ICAN, on its website [www.icanw.org/au](http://www.icanw.org/au), makes the following points:

Over 80 countries have declared support for a nuclear weapons ban, as have the Arab League, ASEAN, Pacific Island states, and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean states.

The International Red Cross, the International Trade Union Federation, the World Council of Churches, the World Medical association, and the World Summit of Nobel Peace Laureates also support a ban.

Biological weapons were banned in 1972, chemical weapons in 1993, land mines in 1997, and cluster munitions in 2008. It is now time for a nuclear weapons ban.

A 2014 Nielsen poll showed that 84% of Australians want the government to join international efforts to ban nuclear weapons. More than 100 Australian parliamentarians have signed an appeal for a ban. In 2016, 50 lawyers wrote to the Defence Minister to end the Extended Nuclear Deterrence policy.

See the next section for the latest developments in Australia's role within the UN disarmament system.

## Quaker Responses

The Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO) in New York keeps a close eye on disarmament matters. Diane Hendrick made the following comments in a report issued in August 2016:

The debate about nuclear weapons has been revived following evidence of near accidents from faulty technical processes, human error, and mistaken perceptions of nuclear alerts; and greater focus on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons.

The UN Conference on Disarmament has failed for 20 years to deliver progress, and the review of the NPT last year produced disappointing results. The Open Ended Working Group has been the most active avenue for new ideas, but the nuclear weapons states do not get involved in that group. It remains to be seen how far those nations can be persuaded to join the emerging momentum for negotiation of a legally-binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons.

British Quakers in 1955 issued a statement that “to rely on the possession of nuclear weapons as a deterrent is faithless; to use them is a sin”. They have continued to protest at the UK’s nuclear weapons program and in August 2015 convened an inter-faith gathering to mark the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan.

The Presiding Clerk of Australian Quakers, Julian Robertson, wrote to the Foreign Minister Julie Bishop in April urging Australia to play a positive role in the UN Open Ended Working Group in order to break the logjam in negotiations towards a world without nuclear weapons. In response, a spokesman for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) said that Australia was suggesting practical steps towards that end – including increased transparency among nuclear-armed states to build confidence and support for disarmament, entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, and starting negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty.

However, Australia’s representatives at the meeting continued to place obstacles in the way of international progress towards a ban, seeing it as a diversion. Michael Slezak (*The Guardian*, 21 August 2016) reported that Australia forced a vote at the meeting to stall moves for a negotiated agreement in 2017. As a result, 68 voted for, 22 against, and 13 abstained. The resolution will go to the UN General Assembly. The decision was reported by Associated Press as follows: *A majority of countries on a U.N.-mandated panel on Friday (19 August) called on the U.N. General Assembly to consider launching multilateral negotiations on nuclear disarmament, voting in a process that has been boycotted by the world's nuclear-armed powers.*

Alyn Ware, who coordinates the advocacy group Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, said the working group was split in two camps: A "hard-line" faction favoring a treaty that calls for the abolition for nuclear weapons right now, and another preferring "incremental measures."

"If you just have a treaty adopted by non-nuclear states, the nuclear weapons states and allies could ignore it," he said, calling for pressure on nuclear-armed powers to adopt "no first use" policies, move toward banning use, cut their arsenals and "give up the idea that you have security by threatening to blow up others."

## Action

There is a need for greater public awareness of the danger of nuclear weapons and the importance of getting further steps towards their abolition.

**Individuals and Meetings can contact Ministers, MPs and Senators to respond to questions about the danger of nuclear weapons in the current environment, and query the reasons for Australia's negative approach towards a ban.**

Public meetings and on-line communications can draw attention to the need for progress towards abolition of nuclear weapons. ICAN's website gives additional information and ideas – [www.icanw.org/au](http://www.icanw.org/au)

QPLC will consider what opportunities there are for pressing political leaders to reverse Australia's official stance on the nuclear weapons ban proposals.

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