

ACTION ALERT 17-6: NORTH KOREA UPDATE

As Quakers we seek a world without war. We seek a sustainable and just community. We have a vision of an Australia that upholds human rights and builds peace internationally, with particular focus on our region. In our approach to government we will promote the importance of dialogue, of listening and of seeking that of God in every person. We aim to work for justice and to take away the occasion for war.

This Update follows the Action Alert 17-2 issued earlier this year. It is a response to recent rising tension between USA and North Korea following further missile tests by North Korea and strong language used by President Trump on behalf of the USA.

The intensity of the conflict over North Korea's nuclear program has increased following (a) the success of North Korea in enhancing its capacity to fire ballistic missiles over long distances, potentially with nuclear warheads attached; (b) the proposal by the USA to install a missile shield system in South Korea; (c) ongoing military exercises by USA and South Korea and allies in the region; and (d) the expansion of international economic and political sanctions by the UN Security Council, with the support of China.

On 11 August, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull gave a sweeping affirmation of Australia's support for US actions in relation to North Korea, implying that military assistance would be offered under the ANZUS Treaty. The Federal Opposition has pointed out that the Treaty requires only 'consultation' rather than automatic assistance. Nevertheless, under the terms of the 1953 Korean War Armistice, Australia could have residual obligations to respond to a breakdown of the truce.

BBC News reported (14 August) that South Korean President Moon Jae-in has called on his US ally to help prevent a war, amid worsening tension over the North's nuclear threat. Mr Moon told the visiting top US military official (General Dunford) that there must be a diplomatic solution to the crisis

The Independent and Peaceful Australia Network (IPAN) group in Canberra (including Quakers) organised a rally outside Parliament House on 16 August to urge resumption of the Six-Party talks about North Korea's nuclear program – involving South Korea, Japan, Russia, China, USA and North Korea – which were suspended several years ago. The media release included the following:

Australia should be supporting a resumption of the Six-Party Talks on North Korea's Nuclear Program, that began in 2003 and involves both Koreas, Japan, USA, China and Russia. These talks offer the possibility of de-escalating the conflict between the USA and North Korea, and of working for a comprehensive outcome that takes into account the concerns of all and lessens the risk of a catastrophic war.

The response of the Australian Government to the recent increase in tension over North Korea has been misleading in relation to ANZUS, and shows little sign of any attempt to achieve a peaceful solution. The ANZUS treaty does not require military action from Australia, but rather consultation, in the event of any attack directed at the U.S. The Prime Minister's immediate response - supporting the US to the hilt - reflects an appalling lack of judgement about the risks of nuclear war and potentially endangers millions of lives including Australians'.

Any decision about Australia's involvement in a war must be subject to a proper debate in Parliament and not exclusively by the Cabinet, as has been advocated by many people since the misguided engagement in the Iraq war. The implications of joining in any combat mission are too important to be entrusted to government leaders alone.

Quakers have made clear in correspondence with the Government and Opposition that we seek a peaceful resolution of the crisis and support efforts on all sides to reduce tensions in order to create the space for such resolution. At this stage, it would help if further representations are made to MPs and Senators urging a measured and diplomatic response, and encouraging the resumption of the Six-Party Talks as a way forward. In addition, it can be suggested that Australia use its influence to seek a cessation of planned military exercises and missile shield developments by the US and allies in the region.

Letters or e-mails to the embassies of countries directly involved would also be helpful, supporting action to reduce tensions and reach a negotiated settlement with North Korea. These addresses may be useful:

China: H.E. Mr Jingye CHENG, Ambassador, 13 Coronation Dr, Yarralumla ACT 2600
chinaemb_au@mfa.gov.ch

Japan: H.E. Mr Sumio KUSAKA, Ambassador, 112 Empire Circ, Yarralumla ACT 2600
consular@cb.mofa.go.jp

S. Korea: H.E. Mr Kyoung-ha WOO, Ambassador, 113 Empire Circ, Yarralumla ACT 2600
australia@mofa.go.kr

USA: Mr James A. Carouso., Charge d'Affaires, Moonah Pl, Yarralumla ACT 2600
CanberraUSAEmbassy@state.gov

Russia: H.E. Mr Grigory LOGVINOV, 78 Canberra Ave, Griffith ACT 2603
russianconsul@homail.com

QPLC's parallel group in the USA, Friends Committee on National Legislation, is telling Friends to ring their Congressional members right now – as a matter of urgency. 'These cycles of escalation are incredibly dangerous'. The National Council of Churches in Korea writes 'The road to peace is a difficult one, but the harder it gets the more important it is that we keep the principle'.

Other options for action include participating in public rallies, letters to newspapers and on-line sites, using social media, or participating in talkback radio.

Canberra
 August 2017