

Letter to ALP Parliamentarians re TPNW, Nuclear War Risk Reduction

Written by John Hallam
Thursday, 11 January 2018 18:25 -

PEOPLE FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT
HUMAN SURVIVAL PROJECT
COUNCIL FOR PEACE WITH JUSTICE

To:
BILL SHORTEN MP
SENATOR PENNY WONG
ANTHONY ALBANESE
TANYA PLIBERSEK
(By email)
All ALP Parliamentarians

Re: Treaty to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons
Nuclear Disarmament and Risk Reduction measures

Dear Bill Shorten and ALP Caucus:

The risk of nuclear war is as high or higher now than it has ever been with the possible exception of the very height of the Cuban Missile Crisis.

The above organizations are writing to you to urge you and your colleagues to:

--Make a firm and clear commitment that an ALP Government will sign and ratify the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

--Make strenuous diplomatic efforts to encourage other Governments to do likewise

--Take other measures, including measures to reduce the growing immediate-term risks of nuclear war, not only with the DPRK, but also between India and Pakistan and possibly with Russia and/or China.

--To give a diplomatic and political priority to issues of nuclear abolition/nuclear risk that reflect the existential and civilization-threatening nature of those risks.

These measures are mutually reinforcing and intertwined.

Signed:

John Hallam
People for Nuclear Disarmament UN Nuclear Disarmament Campaigner
Human Survival Project
Australian Coordinator, Parliamentarians for Nuclear Nonproliferation and Disarmament-
PNND

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Appendix

The risk of nuclear war is one that at least potentially, affects civilization as a whole and that at its greatest extreme, threatens even species survival. This has been recognized to be so since 1945, and first became prominent in the 'Russell-Einstein Manifesto' of 1955. That nuclear war potentially threatens everyone and everything is not a new idea.

But it is one that in recent decades seems to have been forgotten, and nuclear risks do not on the whole play much of a role in day to day political discourse.

They should however, be at the top of the priority list. That the most prominent issue in our parliament today is dual citizenship strikes one as absurd when the current reality of nuclear risks, and their magnitude, is considered. Civilization stands trembling on the brink of the abyss while we discuss whose grandfather was born in the UK, or Greece, and may or may not have bequeathed dual citizenship.

The consensus amongst those with the courage to study nuclear risks is that the risk of nuclear war of some sort, is as high or higher now than it has ever been, with the possible exception of the very height of the Cuban Missile Crisis.

This makes nuclear war of some kind the single most immediate risk to large numbers of humans and possibly to civilization as a whole, that exists. Bar nothing. More immediate than Climate change, important though that is.

In real terms, the likelihood of nuclear war of some kind is the single most important and pressing issue there is. It demands immediate action. It should be at the very top of everyones priority list.

The detail of the issue is of course, that a kind of smorgasbord of nuclear war/nuclear weapons use risks exists, ranging from a possible 'splendid first strike' by the US against Pyongyang and NK missile installations, to a possible DPRK first strike against the US in which the DPRK seeks (maybe successfully) to disable US nuclear command and control, to a DPRK retaliatory strike (i.e. the 'splendid first strike fails to be 'splendid') in which US (and possibly Australian) cities are incinerated with tens of millions of casualties, up to scenarios that involve

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Chinese and Russian nuclear weapons. Once Chinese and Russian nuclear weapons are involved, things can escalate rapidly to a civilization-ending and possibly a species-ending, denouement involving a number of thousands of warheads, a body count in the billions, nuclear winter, and civilizational and ecological collapse.

Avoiding this kind of outcome is simply the most important priority that any human and certainly any parliamentarian could possibly have.

The single most vital thing (though not the only thing – there are other important actions we must take) – that Australia can do in this context of terrifyingly increased nuclear risks, would be to sign, ratify, and urge others to sign and ratify, the TPNW (Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons).

Doing so would send a powerful signal that we were no longer mindless extensions of the United States strategic system. That doubtless is the reason for the lack of support for this position coming from the current Government and from the bowels of DFAT.

Australia is currently committed to 'extended deterrence', which contradicts our stated goal of nuclear abolition. DFAT itself makes it clear that it is absolutely committed to extended deterrence.

However, the fact that signature of the TPNW contradicts 'extended deterrence' is a plus not a minus: Extended deterrence, by binding Australia to the US strategic system, particularly in the current context, is actually a security LIABILITY for Australia. Indeed, our commitment to extended deterrence holds at risk Australian cities in a way they would never be held at risk were we not bound in this way. That the TPNW contradicts extended terrence is an argument IN FAVOUR of its signature and ratification NOT an argument against it.

As long as Australia is seen merely as 'joined at the hip' to US strategic interests, especially by the DPRK but also by Russia and China, a real risk that Australian cities may be targeted exists. By signing and ratifying the TPNW and urging others to do likewise (and by strongly urging the US itself to do likewise), Australia would take the single step that would do most to reduce the all too real nuclear risk to Australian cities.

While the ratification and signature of the TPNW is a vital step, and arguably the most important single step, to making a nuclear weapon free world and to reducing immediate risks to Australian cities, a range of actions is required. Some of those fall within the 'step by step' approach beloved of DFAT, others go somewhat beyond what DFAT with a dangerous excess of caution, is prepared to countenance. There is nothing wrong with a 'step by step' approach to nuclear disarmament: provided that the steps actually get taken.

The most vital of these steps is the reduction of nuclear risks, that is, risks of accidental or deliberate nuclear war.

Australia already supports the resolution on Operational Readiness of Nuclear Weapon Systems in the UNGA. It should consider going a little further and supporting OTHER

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resolutions on reducing nuclear risks, notably India's 'reducing nuclear risks' resolution. In doing so it would be breaking ranks with other NATO – aligned countries, This is a recommendation not a drawback. Once more it would send a signal that needs to be sent.

Australia should also put its support behind the High Level Conference on Nuclear Disarmament, scheduled for March 2018, and at which nuclear risk reduction can be brought up in a forum where the nuclear weapon states are in the room.

The Australian Government recently wrote to lobbyists such as myself that it did NOT support the High Level Conference. This is a serious mistake and should be reversed by an ALP administration.

In writing this letter, the organizations signed above have done so independently of ICAN whose efforts we strongly support, but from an independent point of view. Some recommendations, notably on risk reduction, go beyond what ICAN talks about. The author of this letter has long campaigned on nuclear risk reduction, and travels to the UN every year or twice yearly to speak about nuclear risks.

In writing we are conscious that many of you have taken good positions on nuclear risk and on the need for Australia to get behind the TPNW. Many of you are either signatories of the ICAN Pledge to get Australia to sign the TPNW, or are members of Parliamentarians for Nuclear Nonproliferation and Disarmament,(PNND) or both. For this our congratulations.

It is vital, to repeat, that the ALP (and the Government for that matter) give the nuclear disarmament issue as a whole the survival priority that objective reality demands it give. It is literally the single most pressing human survival/civilizational survival priority that exists. It should be treated as such.