

Letter to Julia Gillard/Bob Carr re UN Security Council/Nuclear Disarmament

Written by John Hallam

Thursday, 25 October 2012 20:01 - Last Updated Sunday, 08 February 2015 22:23

PEOPLE FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

HUMAN SURVIVAL PROJECT

UN SECURITY COUNCIL NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

PRIME MINISTER JULIA GILLARD

FOREIGN AFFAIRS MINISTER SENATOR BOB CARR

cc

Australian Ambassador to UN

Australian Delegation to First Committee

Dear Prime Minister Gillard and Senator Bob Carr:

I would like to congratulate your government on having obtained a seat on the United Nations Security Council.

I regularly lobby the United Nations on nuclear disarmament and in particular on the subject of the operational readiness of nuclear weapon systems, and my efforts over the years together with those of

many others have resulted in the 'operational readiness of nuclear weapon systems' resolution in UNGA, which Australia votes for. I hold regular workshops at the UN and at NPT meetings on accidental nuclear war and the threat to human existence posed by nuclear weapons. In 2009 I was a part of Australia's delegation to the NPT Prepcom.

Together with Professor Peter King I now coordinate the joint CPACS/PND 'Human Survival Project'.

I note that Senator Carr has already mentioned nuclear disarmament as a major priority in Australia's agenda on the security council.

Australia has played a mixed role in nuclear disarmament. Many in the nuclear disarmament community view Australia as overly cautious, and insufficiently willing to offend or to push, great and powerful allies. While over the years we have played a major role in bringing the CTBT into existence, and in creating the ICNND, (as well as the NPDI initiative) we do not always seem to manage to vote for initiatives whose benefit for nuclear disarmament is clear, but which might possibly not attract the approval of those 'great and powerful' allies – allies who themselves need to be prodded gently or otherwise into supporting those initiatives themselves. (Australia should for example, have been making much stronger efforts to impress on the US administration during the time of the formulation of the Nuclear Posture Review, the need to go to lower levels of operational readiness of nuclear weapons systems and to increase decision-making time.)

The impression that is given is that Australia, while it believes that nuclear disarmament and the abolition of nuclear weapons is 'nice', and even highly desirable, has yet to grasp the gravity

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of the existential threat posed by nuclear weapons, and the extent to which the imperative of nuclear abolition rightly trumps even considerations of core national security – and indeed, it is such a core consideration itself, and one that overrides other such considerations. I note that Gareth Evans has been tireless in pointing to the gravity, and existential nature, of the nuclear threat.

There are a number of initiatives that Australia could take, whether on the Security Council or not, that would further the cause of nuclear disarmament within the UN system. These initiatives are essentially cost – free and build on positions already taken.

1) Australia could build on our welcome and overdue rapprochement with India, in supporting Indian nuclear disarmament initiatives. India places much emphasis on the Rajiv Gandhi Peace Plan of 1988, which itself places the existential threat posed by nuclear weapons front-and-centre. In particular, it would be good to see Australia support India's own operating status resolution, 'Reducing Nuclear Dangers'. This resolution tackles the problem posed by the just under 2000 warheads that are maintained in a status such that they can be launched in minutes if not seconds, from a slightly different and complimentary angle to that of the 'Operational Readiness of Nuclear Weapons Systems' resolution that Australia votes for, sponsored by Switzerland, New Zealand, Chile, Nigeria, and Malaysia. So far no 'western' country has seen fit to support it in spite of a wording that might be seen by some as a little 'purer' than the Swiss/NZ resolution. More importantly, the very fact that no 'western' country so far has seen fit to vote for it is the very best reason to vote for it, as doing so would send a message of seriousness and of willingness to break through the otherwise sterile groupings that bedevil UNGA.

2) In the current session of First Committee, the Swiss, as they did in the Vienna NPT Prepcom of May 2012, coordinated a declaration signed by 35 governments, on catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons use. This declaration underlines precisely the existential nature of the threat posed to all nations by the very presence of nuclear weapon systems, and illustrates the overwhelming urgency of nuclear disarmament. In particular it underlines the catastrophic CLIMATIC consequences of nuclear weapons use, reaffirmed in detail by the simulations carried out by Toon and Robock in 2006 and by Ira Helfand with reference to an India-Pakistan nuclear conflagration.

3) Australia must place the timely implementation of a Nuclear Weapons Convention at the very top of its diplomatic agenda. Already, the 2010 NPT Revcon final declaration contains language that commits to an NWC, and the resolution passed by the Australian Parliament also contains such language. A Nuclear Weapons Convention is an essential part of the Ban Ki-Moon 5-point plan. Australia must press, both in the Security Council and elsewhere, for the timely implementation of an NWC. If the P5 do not want an NWC, this should then be done by an 'Ottawa style' process that starts with those who are genuinely committed to the idea and that then applies increasing pressure to holdouts, however 'powerful'.

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4) Australia should also give its support to initiatives designed to 'unblock' the CD, including possibly (without being prescriptive), modifications to the consensus rule that do not permit one or two governments to stymie the efforts over years if not decades, of others. One possible way to do this would be to support or offer initiatives that give the CD a deadline after which if visible progress is still held up for any reason, the process will be removed from the CD and take place in a forum not subject to the consensus rule. At the same time, Australia should not allow lack of progress in the CD to stymie possible progress elsewhere. I note that Norway, Mexico, and Austria have offered a resolution establishing a 'working group' in the current UNGA. This deserves our support.

Finally, Australia should use its position on the Security Council to make clear the priority that nuclear disarmament has for it and for the global community as a whole, and to press the P5 as well as India, Pakistan, and the DPRK, to eliminate their nuclear arsenals. In doing so it needs to work closely with, and consult with others, notably NZ, Switzerland, Chile, Nigeria, Malaysia, Costa-Rica, Austria, and Norway. Australia needs not to be side-tracked into issues with countries that, no matter how repulsive we find their governments, currently do not possess, and who say they do not intend to possess, nuclear weapons, and should keep our attention firmly focussed on those who continue to maintain omniscidal arsenals capable of making the planet uninhabitable in less than an hour possibly as a result of computer error or miscalculation.

Australia has done a great deal in the area of nuclear disarmament, but it could still do more, and needs to raise the issue to the very top of its diplomatic and its national security agenda.

I Reiterate my congratulations on getting a seat on the Security Council,

John Hallam
People for Nuclear Disarmament
Human Survival Project.