

# Letter on Catastrophic Humanitarian Consequences to Foreign Minister Bob Carr

Written by John Hallam

Friday, 12 July 2013 14:57 - Last Updated Sunday, 08 February 2015 22:21

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Letter to Foreign Minister Senator Bob Carr on Catastrophic Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons use

SENATOR BOB CARR, MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS 6273-4112 9228 3655  
CC  
DFAT 6261-2151  
AUSTRALIAN AMBASSADOR TO UNITED NATIONS NEW YORK  
AUSTRALIAN AMBASSADOR TO UNITED NATIONS GENEVA  
OPPOSITION SPOKESPERSON ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

RE:  
STATEMENT ON CATASTROPHIC HUMANITARIAN CONSEQUENCES OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS USE

Dear Senator Bob Carr,

The undersigned groups are writing to you to urge the Australian Government to put its name to the statement already signed by 80 governments, on the catastrophic consequences of nuclear weapons use. This needs to be done as a matter of some urgency, and needs to be done without change to the statement as it now is. An obvious opportunity for Australia to do this would be next October, in the UN, at First Committee.

Former foreign minister Gareth Evans has already made a strong plea, at a recent Canberra meeting of the Parliamentary Network on nuclear Nonproliferation and Disarmament, attended by both sides of politics and by representatives of the diplomatic community and DFAT, for Australia to do this.

In making this plea, we are mindful of the positive references Australia has already made to this statement, and of the excellent contribution Australia has recently made to the deliberations of the Open – Ended Working Group in Geneva.

The dialogue on the catastrophic consequences of nuclear weapons use is seen by many, ranging from Gareth Evans to Aaron Tovish of Mayors for

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Peace, (and the authors of this letter), as well as by many governments, as a potential 'game changer' in nuclear disarmament.

It is certainly the case that if nuclear weapons use constitutes, as many have thought for decades that it does, an immediate threat to human survival, or to what we call 'civilisation', then this is, or should be, a consideration that outweighs all other considerations, including what are otherwise considered to be core national security considerations – indeed, it is in itself a core national security consideration.

The elimination of nuclear weapons logically becomes, not just something that is 'desirable' in some abstract sense, but a pressing survival priority.

The 80–Government Joint Statement on Catastrophic Humanitarian Consequences of nuclear weapons use, whose text appears below, notes that:

“It is in the interest of the very survival of humanity that nuclear weapons are never used again, under any circumstances.”

and:

“The catastrophic effects of a nuclear weapon detonation, whether by accident, miscalculation or design, cannot be adequately addressed. All efforts must be exerted to eliminate this threat. The only way to guarantee that nuclear weapons will never be used again is through their total elimination.”

Research done by distinguished climatologists, professors Brian Toon and Alan Robock, as well as others, from 2006 onwards has underlined that even a 'small' nuclear exchange between India and Pakistan would have global climatic consequences, and concern over these consequences has driven the 'catastrophic humanitarian consequences' dialogue.

The undersigned groups therefore urge you and the Australian government to sign the statement on catastrophic humanitarian consequences, as it now is and without dilution or weakening.

Signed

John Hallam,

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Human Survival Project/People for Nuclear Disarmament  
Prof. Peter King, Human Survival Project, Founder-Director, Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies  
(Identification purposes only)

Members of the Strategic Forces Subcommittees of the US Congress and the Russian Duma

Senior Nuclear Forces Decision Makers

## 80 GOVERNMENTS DECLARATION ON CATASTROPHIC CONSEQUENCES OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS USE

President Putin  
President Obama  
United States Secretary Of Defence Chuck Hagel  
Russian Minister Of Defence  
United States Secretary Of State John Kerry  
Russian Minister Of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov,

Dear Members of the Strategic Forces Subcommittees of the US Congress and the Russian Duma,

Dear Senior Decision-makers on nuclear forces in the United States and Russia,

The undersigned non-governmental organisations are sending you a declaration on catastrophic consequences of nuclear weapons use made at the 2013 Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty Preparatory Committee, signed by 80 (listed) governments. A much larger number of governments including many from NATO have expressed sympathy and solidarity with what it says.

A 'decent respect for the opinions of mankind', as the US Declaration of Independence puts it, must take into account the fact that vote after vote at the United Nations, starting with the very first vote ever taken by the General Assembly, has asked for the elimination of nuclear weapons. The motive behind all these votes has been self-explanatory: It is the simple insight that if nuclear weapons are not eliminated they will

sooner or later, most probably by accident, malfunction or miscalculation, be used, and such use could be fatal for humankind.

It is notable that this declaration contains the words:

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“It is in the interest of the very survival of humanity that nuclear weapons are never used again, under any circumstances.”

Recent research done by a number of distinguished climate scientists, using up to date NASA climate models, indicates that the environmental consequences of the use of even the relatively small nuclear arsenals of India and Pakistan could lead to up to a billion deaths globally. A full-scale US versus Russia nuclear “exchange” would destroy civilization—the “world” as we know it. Peer-reviewed studies predict the long-term environmental consequences of such a conflict would likely eliminate growing seasons for at least a decade, leading to global famine for most, if not all, humans.

As long as the US and Russia insist on maintaining large fractions of their nuclear arsenals at launch-ready status, a significant (non-zero) probability of an accidental (or otherwise) large-scale use remains. The only certain way to ensure that nuclear weapons are never used, as this and other declarations make clear, is to abolish them.

We note that the Obama administration seems to have now acknowledged the vital significance of this climate research, and a US official has even described it at the Geneva NPT Prepcom last May as a 'major driver' of administration policy. This is a significant and welcome change from previous administration statements. However we would argue forcefully that the only rational response to these well established and uncontested facts is to seek to eliminate nuclear arsenals completely on an urgent basis. No other responsible and rational alternative exists.

We commend the declaration below to the strategic forces subcommittees of the US Congress and Russian Duma. We urge both US and Russian governments to take the rational and responsible actions necessary to remove the biggest threat to international strategic stability and human security by eliminating nuclear arsenals.

(NGO signatures at end)

Second Session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2015 Review Conference  
of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear  
Weapons

Joint Statement on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons:

Delivered by Ambassador Abdul Samad Minty,

Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations, at Geneva, 24 April 2013

Chairperson,

I am taking the floor on behalf of the following States Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), namely:

Algeria, Argentina, Austria, Belarus, Bangladesh, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Cyprus, Cuba, Denmark, Djibouti, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Ghana, Georgia, Grenada, Guatemala, Holy See, Honduras, Iceland, Indonesia, Iran, Ireland, Jamaica, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kuwait, Lebanon, Lesotho, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Maldives, Malta, Mauritius, Mexico, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Nepal, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Norway, Palau, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Qatar, Serbia, Samoa, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Swaziland, Switzerland, Tanzania, Thailand, Togo, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Uganda, Ukraine, Uruguay, Yemen, Zambia and my own country, South Africa.

Our countries are deeply concerned about the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons. While this has been known since nuclear weapons were first developed and is reflected in various UN resolutions and multilateral instruments, it has not been at the core of nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation deliberations for many years. Although it constitutes the *raison d'être* of the NPT, which cautions against the "devastation that would be visited upon all mankind by a nuclear war and the consequent need to make every effort to avert the danger of such a war and to take measures to safeguard the security of peoples", this issue has consistently been ignored in the discourse on nuclear weapons.

Yet, past experience from the use and testing of nuclear weapons has amply demonstrated the unacceptable harm caused by the immense, uncontrollable destructive capability and indiscriminate nature of these weapons. The effects of a nuclear weapon detonation are not constrained by national borders--it is therefore an issue of deep concern to all. Beyond the immediate death and destruction caused by a detonation, socio-economic development will be impeded, the environment will be destroyed, and future generations will be robbed of their health, food, water and other vital resources.

In recent years, the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons has increasingly been recognised as a fundamental and global concern that must be at the core of all deliberations on nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation.

This issue is now firmly established on the global agenda: The 2010 Review Conference of the NPT expressed "deep concern at the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons". Similarly, the 2011 resolution of the Council of Delegates of the International

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Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement emphasised the incalculable human suffering associated with any use of nuclear weapons, and the implications for international humanitarian law.

The March 2013 Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons held in Oslo presented a platform to engage in a fact-based discussion on the impact of a nuclear weapon detonation. The broad participation at the Conference reflects the recognition that the catastrophic effects of a detonation are of concern and relevance to all. A key message from experts and international organisations is that no State or international body could address the immediate humanitarian emergency caused by a nuclear weapon detonation or provide adequate assistance to victims. We warmly welcome Mexico's announcement of a follow-up Conference to further broaden and deepen understanding of this matter and the resolve of the international community to address the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons.

It is in the interest of the very survival of humanity that nuclear weapons are never used again, under any circumstances.

The catastrophic effects of a nuclear weapon detonation, whether by accident, miscalculation or design, cannot be adequately addressed. All efforts must be exerted to eliminate this threat. The only way to guarantee that nuclear weapons will never be used again is through their total elimination.

It is a shared responsibility of all States to prevent the use of nuclear weapons, to prevent their vertical and horizontal proliferation and to achieve nuclear disarmament, including through fulfilling the objectives of the NPT and achieving its universality.

The full implementation of the 2010 Action Plan and previous outcomes aimed at achieving the objectives of the NPT must therefore not be postponed any further.

Addressing the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons is an absolute necessity.

As an element that underpins the NPT, it is essential that the humanitarian consequences inform our work and actions during the current Review Cycle and beyond.

This is an issue that affects not only governments, but each and every citizen of our interconnected world. By raising awareness about the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons, civil society has a crucial role to play, side-by-side with governments, as we fulfil our responsibilities. We owe it to future generations to work together to rid our world of the threat posed by nuclear weapons.

I thank you."

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### NGO Signatures

#### Drafting team:

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