

Letter to Julie Bishop Urging Support for Austria Pledge

Written by John Hallam
Friday, 20 March 2015 18:43 -

PEOPLE FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT HUMAN SURVIVAL PROJECT

RE: VIENNA CONFERENCE ON HUMANITARIAN CONSEQUENCES OF NUCLEAR
WEAPONS: AUSTRIAN PLEDGE

JULIE BISHOP AUSTRALIAN MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS
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Dear Foreign Minister Julie Bishop:

The Human Survival Project (a joint project of People for Nuclear Disarmament (PND) and the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies) and People for Nuclear Disarmament are writing to urge you to support the Austrian Pledge, made at the end of the December 8-9, 2014 Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons.

John Hallam, representing PND and the Human Survival Project, attended both the ICAN NGO forum and the official intergovernmental meeting, into whose agenda we had some input. PND and the Human Survival Project strongly endorse the Austrian Pledge, in particular its references to human survival and to the pressing need:

(1) to decrease short-term nuclear weapons risks by decreasing operational readiness of nuclear weapons systems, (a position Australia has supported for a number of years)

(2) ensure early implementation of ArtVI NPT obligations.

Mr Hallam and Prof. Peter King will be present at the upcoming NPT Review Conference in NY in April/May at which the Chairs Final Summary and the Austrian Pledge will, we understand, be presented.

A number of recent events and developments make the implementation of ArtVI obligations to disarm, and the lowering of nuclear risks, and thus the Austrian pledge, pressingly urgent. These include (but are not confined to):

--The recent movement of the hands of the 'doomsday clock' from 5 minutes to 'midnight' to 3 minutes.

--Ongoing modernisation and upgrading of nuclear weapons systems in all of the nuclear weapons states in contradiction to NPT article VI disarmament obligations.

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--The recent article in Der Spiegel in which it is suggested that the risk of nuclear weapons use between Russia and NATO may actually be HIGHER than during the Cold War.

If nothing else was clear from the proceedings of the Vienna conference two things surely emerged with crystal clarity:

(a) That the risk of nuclear weapons use, including a massive US/Russia exchange, is, in any given year, nonzero, and is probably much higher than we imagine it to be. Our survival thus far in the nuclear age might be regarded as statistically improbable.

(b) A massive use of nuclear weapons would certainly destroy what we call civilisation and would put human survival in question.

Nuclear disarmament is thus, clearly, a 'Human Survival Imperative.'

As such, progress toward it must trump all other considerations including so – called 'national security' considerations: Indeed it must itself be regarded as itself the very highest 'national security' consideration.

We note that in previous correspondence the Australian government has argued (we believe incorrectly) that a nuclear weapons ban that did not have the willing support of the Nuclear Weapon States would be ineffective. On the contrary, a ban would delegitimise and marginalise the possession and use of nuclear weapons, which is a first step to their elimination. In any case, the Austrian pledge, no doubt anticipating such objections, speaks of the need to: "...identify and pursue effective measures to fill the legal gap for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons".

Support for the Austrian pledge in this context is the only rational policy direction. Movement toward the goals set out in that pledge are a policy imperative of the very highest priority for all governments.

Australia must give its very strongest support to the Austrian pledge.

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