

Letter Faxed to Julie Bishop/DFAT re First Committee resolutions

Written by John Hallam
Thursday, 08 October 2015 16:43 -

PEOPLE FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

HUMAN SURVIVAL PROJECT

ATTN JULIE BISHOP, MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

CC

TANYA PLIBERSEK

ANTHONY ALBANESE

SENATOR SCOTT LUDLUM

DFAT

AUSTRALIAN UN MISSION

RE: NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT RESOLUTIONS IN FIRST COMMITTEE

Dear Julie Bishop:

I wish to draw your attention to three important draft nuclear disarmament resolutions coming up in First Committee and the General Assembly in New York, which are likely to be lodged in the next week or so. These resolutions all spring from the series of conferences on Catastrophic Humanitarian Consequences of nuclear weapons that took place in Oslo, Nayarit, and Vienna, the last in Dec2014.

They are:

--Draft Resolution on the "Humanitarian Pledge for the Prohibition and Elimination of Nuclear Weapons"

--Draft Resolution on Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons

--Draft Resolution "Taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations"

I have already written to you about a number of other resolutions, and will repeat what I said below.

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The Humanitarian Pledge and Humanitarian Consequences resolutions state repeatedly and unequivocally that the use of nuclear weapons especially in large numbers, would potentially threaten human survival itself, and would definitely threaten the survival of civilization.

Thus, the 3rd para of the Humanitarian Pledge resolution states that:

“Understanding that the immediate, mid- and long-term consequences of a nuclear weapon explosion are significantly graver than it was understood in the past and will not be constrained by national borders but have regional or even global effects, potentially threatening the survival of humanity,”

and again:

'Affirming that it is in the interest of the very survival of humanity that nuclear weapons are never used again, under any circumstances,'

While according to the Humanitarian Consequences draft resolution,

'Recalling also that the First Special Session of the General Assembly devoted to Disarmament (SSOD-1) stressed in 1978 that “nuclear weapons pose the greatest danger to mankind and to the survival of civilization”,'

and:

'Emphasizing that the catastrophic consequences of nuclear weapons affect not only governments, but each and every citizen of our interconnected world and have deep implications for human survival, for the environment, for socio-economic development, for our economies and for the health of future generations

Stresses that it is in the interest of the very survival of humanity that nuclear weapons are never used again, under any circumstances;'

You will recall from previous correspondence from PND and the Human Survival Project, that a continuing theme of ours has been, and continues to be, that large scale nuclear weapons use would indeed threaten human survival. While it may not be absolutely certain that in the event of such use, all humans would necessarily perish over the following few decades from starvation and by literally freezing in the dark, it is certain from the information shared at the Oslo, Nayarit, and Vienna Conferences that what we now call 'civilization' would cease to

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function even if a very few warheads were used, that a subcontinental nuclear war could provoke global famine, and that a larger scale nuclear weapons use such as between Russia and NATO, would, as during the cold war, both completely destroy civilization and would put a question mark at least, behind human survival. That the most immediate threat to humans as a species comes from ourselves via the nuclear arsenals of the largest nuclear weapons possessors is hardly a new idea, but it is, alas! Still true, as reaffirmed by the Evans Commission.

What is also made clear in the Humanitarian Pledge draft resolution is that the danger of large-scale (and other) nuclear weapons use is growing. This became obvious last January when the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists Advisory Board (consisting of a dozen or so Nobel prizewinners) moved the hands of the 'doomsday clock' from 5 minutes to midnight to three minutes to midnight, a position it had not been in since 1983, 'the year the world nearly ended' (an event now commemorated on Sept26, the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons').

Thus, the draft resolution on the Humanitarian Pledge notes that:

“Aware that the risk of a nuclear weapon explosion is significantly greater than previously assumed and is indeed increasing with increased proliferation, the lowering of the technical threshold for nuclear weapon capability, the ongoing modernization of nuclear weapon arsenals in States possessing nuclear weapons, and the role that is attributed to nuclear weapons in the nuclear doctrines of such states,...

In the other two resolutions, the currently growing risks of actual nuclear weapons use are reflected in the very necessary measures they canvass to actually reduce those risks including in particular the need for measures to lower the operational readiness of nuclear weapons, and to decrease their salience in security doctrines. Australia should of course play its part in reducing such salience by withdrawing from arrangements of 'extended deterrence', arrangements that not only decrease rather than increase our real security, but which also hamstringing our ability to advocate consistently for the elimination of nuclear weapons.

You (Julie Bishop) have said that in order to actually be effective in advocating for nuclear disarmament it is necessary to 'engage but not enrage' the nuclear weapons powers.

It is most certainly necessary to engage them (and especially our 'great and powerful ally'), and it would be wonderful to see exactly such engagement, engagement aimed at pushing them to genuinely fulfill their art VI NPT obligations, - really take place. We urge the government precisely to engage the nuclear weapons states with the aim of persuading them to eliminate their nuclear arsenals as per their already existing but unfulfilled obligations.

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When the crunch comes however, it has to be emphasized that the survival of humans as a species and of civilization (as well as most complex land-based living things) has to be regarded as a priority that simply trumps all possible other priorities. There simply CANNOT be a more important priority than this, and it must be regarded as in itself a core national security objective.

Of course the nuclear weapons states will not immediately sign onto a nuclear weapons ban. Of course they will try to make an open-ended working group operate by a consensus that they can then block. Of course they will have to be dragged kicking and screaming into elimination of nuclear weapons. Of course their efforts to white-wash an OEWG will have to be resisted.

But that does not mean that an important US ally such as Australia will have no influence if it supports a ban or an OEWG as these resolutions suggest. Quite the contrary. Our support would be game-changing.

Australia should wholeheartedly support these three draft resolutions.

I have also suggested in recent correspondence that we should support the NAM resolution, the New Agenda resolution, and the Reducing Nuclear Dangers resolution. Support for these resolutions – again from a key US ally – would send vitally important signals that need absolutely to be sent.

In doing so, Australia would be both helping to ensure that a nuclear apocalypse never takes place, and would be taking wise steps to safeguard its own security.

You are urged to support the three resolutions discussed above, plus the NAM, Reducing Nuclear Dangers, and New Agenda resolutions as well as a number of other resolutions that help to take the world in a nuclear-weapons-free direction.

Our support of the Operational readiness resolution, and our sponsorship of the joint Australia-Japan resolution on nuclear disarmament is gratefully acknowledged. These positive steps need to be supplemented by the measures urged above.

John Hallam

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