

13 DEC 2018 PEOPLE FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT HUMAN SURVIVAL PROJECT

ALP CONF, MORRISSON GOVT, URGED TO TAKE URGENT ACTION ON NUCLEAR WAR RISK

The Morrison Government and the ALP National Conference, commencing Sunday, are being urged to take urgent action to reduce the risk of global nuclear war which would most likely destroy civilization and place a question – mark after human survival. Senator Penny Wong placed a motion on notice in the Senate on risk reduction the week before last, which missed out by a single cross-bench vote. Former foreign minister Gareth Evans, and former minister and CEO of the ICRC, Robert Tickner, have both urged the upcoming ALP conference to do more to diminish the risk of nuclear war. Senator Penny Wong recently spoke on reducing nuclear war risks at a national conference of the Australian Institute of International Affairs.(AIIA). While Robert Tickner urged support for the Nuclear Ban Treaty (TPNW), Senator Wong focussed on risk reduction measures such as no-first-use (NFU) and de-alerting. Both, as well as Gareth Evans who adopted an intermediate 'both-and' position, emphasized the urgency of action to reduce nuclear risks. PND strongly agrees.

According to PND and the Human Survival Project's UN nuclear disarmament campaigner John Hallam:

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The risk of nuclear war, right now, either by accident, miscalculation, or by malware, not to mention by Trump tweet, is as high as it has ever been, even at the height of the cold war, when publics worldwide responded by massive demonstrations and protests.”

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Yet for most people this is a reality either that they are completely unconscious of, or which is so remote that its unbelievable.”

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The fact is however that everyone from former commanders of US and Soviet nuclear forces to roomfuls of Nobel-prizewinning nuclear weapons experts thinks that the level of nuclear war risk – particularly in the light of recent developments with the INF treaty – is unprecedentedly high.”

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To paraphrase Gareth Evans – there are two immediate existential risks to humanity and to civilization – Global warming, and nuclear weapons. Global warming is happening right now, but will take 150 years or so to make the planet uninhabitable. Nuclear weapons will either do so in roughly 90 horrible minutes, or not – in which case we will have defied probability, if we haven't already done so. We will be in the rarefied realms of either blind good luck or the even more rarefied realms of divine intervention- to recycle language used by former US nuclear weapons commander General Lee Butler.”

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If we continue to do nothing to reduce the risk of nuclear war, as we are doing nothing on climate change, we will be relying on divine intervention – on miracles, in effect – for global security. Whatever your theology, this does not seem like a good idea.”

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Both signature and ratification of the Ban Treaty and Penny Wong's emphasis on nuclear risk reduction are equally important and equally need to be implemented if we are to respond sensibly to the greatest security challenge in the world, and avoid risking a premature end to civilization so-called, and to much else beyond even that. We should –

as an existential priority – be pressing for immediate measures that will make nuclear war less likely. And we should equally be pressing for a broad agenda of measures, including the signature and ratification of the Ban Treaty, and urging our fellow Governments – including those of the US, Russia, China, France, the UK, India, Israel, Pakistan and the DPRK, all of whom have nuclear weapons – to sign and ratify it and to eliminate their nuclear arsenals. The TPNW may be 'normative' but will only begin to truly bite when it is signed by nuclear weapon states.”

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It is vital that this life and death issue is adequately discussed at the upcoming ALP conference and that measures are adopted that measure up to the gravity of the situation. Equally important is that the Morrison Government, while it is still a Government, takes the nuclear risk situation seriously and adopts international security policies that, once again, are equal to the gravity of the situation.”

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