

Letter to Julie Bishop re DFAT Undermining of Humanitarian Pledge

Written by John Hallam
Saturday, 19 September 2015 18:33 -

PEOPLE FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT
HUMAN SURVIVAL PROJECT

ATTN JULIE BISHOP
MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS
MALCOLM TURNBULL PRIME MINISTER

CC
BILL SHORTEN
TANYA PLIBERSEK
ANTHONY ALBANESE
SENATOR SCOTT LUDLUM
DFAT

RE: NUCLEAR WEAPONS BAN

Dear Julie Bishop,

It will come as no surprise to you that People for Nuclear Disarmament (PND) and the Human Survival Project, are appalled to discover via ICAN,(International Campaign Against Nuclear Weapons) that Australia not only rejects the idea of a nuclear weapons ban – but, it seems, has actively worked to undermine efforts to achieve it.

Both this blocking effort, and indeed, Australia's dependence on US extended deterrence are, we believe, tragically misguided and actually threaten, and not protect, Australia's security. They make us less, not more, secure.

The argument has been, it seems, that as long as nuclear weapons continue to exist, Australia will depend on a nuclear guarantee from the United States. In addition the idea of a nuclear weapons 'ban' is seen as 'unrealistic'. Preferred paths seem to be a 'step by step' approach or a 'building blocks' approach. PND and HSP have no objection to either of those approaches, but would affirm strongly that in order for either of them (or indeed any approach whatsoever) to be effective, the requisite steps actually have to be taken and the building blocks actually built with. In addition a ban at some (early) point is an essential step – or building block. There is simply no way around a ban if the goal is to eliminate nuclear weapons. And it will, we believe, be absolutely necessary actually to apply real pressure to the nuclear weapon states. While a ban may not deliver miracles it is an essential tool in the difficult but vital task of bringing about global zero.

The idea of a nuclear guarantee involves the assumption that such a guarantee is somehow credible. It assumes that such a guarantee will in fact make us safer rather than make us less safe from a nuclear threat.

In fact, it takes little imagination or insight to see that far from making Australia safer, our

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close linkage with 'extended deterrence' makes us even less safe, and indeed makes us into a nuclear target in ways that we would not be, absent such a connection, symbolised by the Pine Gap communications base which makes us complicit in US nuclear targeting and execution strategies that jeopardise both life on the planet and human survival.

Extended deterrence is a security liability not a security guarantee.

We know unambiguously that Pine Gap is a high priority target. Australia would clearly and unambiguously be safer from nuclear attack without a reliance on US extended deterrence, than it is with extended deterrence.

Australia will most certainly be safer from nuclear attack in a world in which there are no nuclear weapons than in a world in which nuclear weapons exist.

If nuclear weapons continue to exist and are not eliminated, then the growth of arsenals in places that do pose a potential threat to Australia is guaranteed. The US 'umbrella' far from making us safer, is more akin to painting a target on our backside.

Of course, the reasons for wishing to eliminate nuclear weapons extend much further and deeper than considerations of mere national security to the security and indeed the continuance of the human species as a whole, a consideration that surely trumps all possible 'national' security considerations.

Nuclear weapons have been regarded even (and especially) by their own inventors as a danger to the continuance of humans as a species.

If there is even a slight chance that this might be true, sheer prudence must compel us to see their elimination as an imperative for global human survival. The importance of this goal must elbow aside other goals including so-called 'national security' and indeed must itself be seen as a national security imperative of existential importance.

Australia has argued that a nuclear weapons ban that does not involve the Nuclear Weapons States is somehow 'futile'.

This is, bluntly, a bizarre idea. It is nothing of the kind.

A nuclear weapon ban marginalizes nuclear weapons in the same way that a ban on chemical weapons marginalizes those who fail to eliminate their chemical weapon arsenals. Even if it does not lead to the immediate elimination of nuclear arsenals it makes it clear that to the world as a whole, nuclear weapons (as potentially planet/species-destroying weapons) are beyond the pale. It marginalizes those who continue to possess them – and of course those who rely on them for security, as indeed it should do.

Australia, as a close ally of the United States would be playing a far more responsible role if it used that relationship to urge its ally to eliminate its nuclear arsenal completely.

Australia, far from – as it has done – mobilizing NATO and other states against the

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Humanitarian Pledge and the idea of a nuclear weapon ban should be using its not inconsiderable influence amongst those very governments in full support of the ban, the Humanitarian Pledge, and the Joint Statement now signed by 159 governments (shamefully not including ours) on the Catastrophic Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons use.

Australia should also be using our influence with both the US and Russia, to urge immediate, short-term measures to reduce the risk of a nuclear confrontation between NATO and Russia – a confrontation that, should it result in nuclear weapons use, would readily result in the destruction of civilization and the destruction of Australia.

Australia has the capability to engage with the issue of nuclear disarmament in a constructive and a proactive way that accords this survival issue the overriding importance it actually has.

We should do so. What we have done to date neither reflects credit on us nor does it enhance – rather it imperils – our security. We can do different and better.

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