

Letter to Julie Bishop re NY Nuclear Weapons Prohibition Meetings

Written by John Hallam

Wednesday, 08 February 2017 14:32 - Last Updated Wednesday, 08 February 2017 14:33

PEOPLE FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT NSW (PND-NSW) HUMAN SURVIVAL PROJECT

Julie Bishop,
Minister for Foreign Affairs
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cc

Anthony Albanese
Bill Shorten
Tanya Plibersek
Senator Scott Ludlum
Senator Lee Rhiannon
Senator Lisa Singh

RE: NEW YORK NUCLEAR WEAPONS PROHIBITION MEETING March 27-31, June15-July7
2017 NEW YORK

Dear Foreign Minister Julie Bishop:

As you are no doubt well aware, under the terms of resolution L41, meetings for a negotiating process to achieve a legal prohibition (by simple ban or other legal instrument) on nuclear weapons, are to be held at the UN in New York on March 27-31, and over the 3 weeks June15-July7 2017.

The recent announcement by the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists that the 'Doomsday Clock' has been re-set to 2 and a half minutes to 'midnight', 'midnight' representing the destruction of civilization, underlines what has been said many times: that the elimination of nuclear weapons envisaged by L41 is not an 'optional' 'feelgood' measure that would be 'nice' to achieve someday. It is a pressing survival imperative. If it is not achieved humans as a species may not survive, and what we call 'civilization' and much more than that, will most certainly not survive.

It is in the highest degree unfortunate that Australia has to date, using arguments that entirely lack credibility, opposed efforts to break the logjam in progress toward a world free of nuclear weapons. Australia should be strongly supporting all such efforts – as indeed should each and every nuclear weapons state or nuclear weapons possessing state.

Australia has mistakenly counterposed a prohibition/ban and what it calls the 'progressive' approach to the legal prohibition of nuclear weapons.

In fact, the most distinguishing characteristic of the 'progressive' approach has been its continued failure to achieve any progress whatsoever.

Even modest but essential short-term risk reduction elements of the 'progressive approach', which are far short of abolition but are arguably essential for human survival, have not been

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realized. Commonsense essential measures such as No First Use, information exchange between militaries, and lowering of alert status, backed by repeated UN resolutions and by the NGO community in Washington, have not been implemented. This invalidates neither the 'progressive approach' itself nor the existential importance of those risk reduction measures. Rather, it once more underlines the need for additional measures to break the logjam and make possible progress on any approach however and whatever it is called, toward the elimination of nuclear weapons.

Australia, rather than unproductively counterposing a 'progressive approach' that is in fact not progressing, and a ban, prohibition, interlocking legal framework, or nuclear weapons convention, or hybrid of all of the above, - should recognize that these are mutually reinforcing and not mutually excluding.

Australia has argued that a ban/prohibition that fails to include the nuclear weapon states themselves will be either ineffective or somehow dangerous and counterproductive.

It is impossible to see how this could be. The very least that a prohibition will do is make it clear that as far as the overwhelming majority of Governments are concerned, nuclear weapons are now, and indeed always have been, illegal. The ban does not so much establish a new reality as cement and repeat one that has always been there. The nuclear weapons states may choose to thumb their noses at a prohibition, but, as with other weapons of mass destruction that have been first prohibited and then eliminated, this will become increasingly difficult.

If Australia is sincere about wishing to eliminate nuclear weapons it should attend the meetings in New York on 27-31 March and 15June-7July 2017. It should vigorously encourage others, particularly others with security relationships with the United States, to do likewise. Finally it should use its presence to encourage every government to support the creation of a legal instrument (by whatever name – Ban, Convention, Interlocking Framework Agreement, etc) that outlaws nuclear weapons as soon as possible.

It would be completely counterproductive if Australia were to attend but only with the object of performing the role of a 'spoiler' as it has done in GA debates and during the OEWG. That discreditable path leads – and has led – nowhere. Australia should attend with the clear objective of furthering a ban, prohibition, or 'legal instrument' that will lead to the elimination of nuclear weapons, and of persuading others to do likewise.

The recent call by former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, for the United States and Russia to jointly sponsor a UNSC resolution that outlaws nuclear war – effectively outlawing the USE of nuclear weapons – would be exceedingly helpful in the current fraught context. Australia should unreservedly support any such call.

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Human Survival Project

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