



14 February 2018

Malcolm Turnbull MP
Prime Minister of Australia
Parliament House ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister,

For more than 350 years Quakers have worked to 'take away the occasion of all war', earning a Nobel Peace prize along the way, and we have always resisted the investment of public funds in the fostering of war. The announcement of the policy to increase greatly Australia's role in the international arms trade is a shocking development which threatens decades of careful peacebuilding work. I seek your responses to the following questions and concerns:

How does this define Australia in the eyes of the world?

Marc Purcell, chief executive of the Australian Council for International Development told the ABC "*We should not be getting into the game of marketing weapons which kill, maim and bring great sorrow and destruction to communities around the world*". Australia has staked a claim to be an arbiter in world issues, including a seat on the UN Human Rights Council. How can that position be maintained if Australia is increasingly a beneficiary of conflict scenarios? Our position on the world-stage is inevitably compromised. Can the government clarify how this policy is consistent with Australia's international commitments enshrined in treaties intended to limit conflict?

Is this a time to foster war directly by the selling of major weapons?

The world is now poised on the brink of Armageddon as much as it has ever been, arguably more given the posturing of unreliable leaders with nuclear arsenals. Since 2012, other countries have recognised the fragility of global peace. Germany has reduced its arms sales by nearly 40%, and France by around 6%. Yet Australia is now moving in the opposite direction, quite at odds with previous strong leadership in getting the United Nations Arms Trade Treaty agreed and implemented internationally to regulate the arms industry. This Treaty came into force in December 2014, and has 130 signatories, and 89 ratifications, including Australia's. Australia has a history of positive actions for peace internationally, but recent decades have reversed that admirable record. How can the government reconcile aggressive pursuit of arms sales with its established commitment to peace, in particular to make the arms trade more responsible?

Does this policy keep Australians safe?

No evidence has been given to support claims that a more robust arms industry is essential for the nation's defence. According to the Minister for Defence, Marise Payne MP, the policy direction

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outlined in the Defence White Paper (February 2016) “represents the Government’s firm commitment to the Australian people that we will keep our nation safe and protect our way of life for future generations”. The policy now announced does not fulfil this aim, it puts Australian citizens at greater risk of attack when we are seen to be warmongers on the global stage. Australia’s national interest is not the same as Australia’s economic interest: can the government demonstrate how any claimed economic benefits of this policy are beneficial for national security?

Who would be the customers for Australian Weapons?

Defence Industry Minister Christopher Pyne has said prospective buyers would face stringent checks to ensure “[we] don’t get into markets where we don’t want to be” Such assurances that Australian weapons will not be used unethically or fall into the wrong hands are far too vague, and it’s hard to see that this can ever be guaranteed in today’s fast-moving globalised markets. Germany has recently taken firm action to block its arms trade with Turkey because the weapons are being used against the Kurdish ethnic minority. What action can our government identify which has policed or will police Australian arms sales?

Does this policy create jobs and build the Australian economy?

What is the evidence that this government funding is more beneficial than investment in other sectors? The work involved seems likely to be highly technical, requiring specialist skills which may not be available in Australia. Even if there are jobs for Australians with manufacturing skills they won’t be located in areas of high unemployment generated by the collapse of other manufacturing industries which the government has not supported, most notably the manufacture of Australian cars. Workers and support services from these industries can’t simply be transferred to the arms industry. Union leaders have stated that “It’s a complete fallacy that there will be sustainable, long-term jobs in making weapons of war ... We know exactly where the bulk of this money will go – to the international weapons manufacturers and their foreign shareholders” (Shirley Winton, spokesperson for ‘Peace and Justice is Union Business’) Can the government specify clearly the nature, extent and location of jobs created and how the income generated by exports will directly feed the Australian economy?

Above all, this is a moral issue. As a faith organisation, the Society of Friends has a clear obligation to resist the promotion of war in any form as utterly inconsistent with this faith.

We therefore protest against this declared policy in the strongest possible terms and will undertake to work with other peace-building bodies to reverse this decision.

Yours faithfully,



Jo Jordan
Presiding Clerk
The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Australia

Cc: Hon Julie Bishop, MP, Minister for Foreign Affairs
Hon Bill Shorten MP

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