

Quaker Peace & Legislation Committee



WATCHING BRIEF 23-4: NUCLEAR WEAPONS BAN TREATY URGENT CHALLENGE

As Quakers we seek a world without war. We seek a sustainable and just community. We have a vision of an Australia that upholds human rights and builds peace internationally, with particular focus on our region. In our approach to government, we will promote the importance of dialogue, of listening and of seeking that of God in every person. We aim to work for justice and to take away the occasion for war.

June 2023

QPLC issued a Watching Brief (18-6) about the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons adopted by the UN General Assembly in July 2017. In 2022 we issued an update about the first meeting of States Parties held in Vienna, Austria. Since then the international situation has become more dangerous, and the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists has narrowed the measurement of global threat to '90 seconds to midnight'. The Evatt Foundation has published a valuable Journal (April 2023) outlining recent developments and analyses. This Brief is built upon the contributions to that Journal by a wide range of concerned people. It concludes with suggested action.

Background

The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) began in Australia in 2007, and gained support from non-nuclear weapons states and NGOs because of its focus on the humanitarian implications of the use of nuclear weapons, and the failure of the nuclear weapons states to take steps towards disarmament as required under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) was adopted by a vote of 122 countries in favour. Australia opposed it. The Treaty (a) sought comprehensive bans on nuclear weapons and related activity, (b) created a path for nuclear states to eliminate weapons and stockpiles, (c) set up a verification process and safeguards, and (d) required commitment to environmental remediation. The number of signatories to the Treaty is 92, and the number of ratifications has now reached 68.

The First Meeting of States Parties in 2022 noted that there are still around 13,000 nuclear weapons and adopted an action plan of 50 items, urging greater commitment to the Treaty, helping those harmed by testing and related trauma, establishing a scientific advisory group, and linking the Treaty to existing anti-nuclear weapons treaties. Several youth representatives

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from the Pacific attended the meeting, to make clear the significance of the Treaty to Pacific communities affected adversely by more than 315 nuclear tests over the years. Ten members of the Pacific Islands Forum have ratified the Treaty already, along with New Zealand. Australia sent an observer (Susan Templeman MP).

Current Perspectives (from Evatt Foundation Journal)

A statement to the Prime Minister in June 2022 from the Aboriginal people affected by the atomic testing in the 1950s in South Australia expressed the view that the tests were an 'act of war' against them, leaving a legacy of illness, contamination, harm and intergenerational suffering. They urged the Australian Parliament to invite their representatives to the table to work on remediation and solutions, and to get Australia to sign the TPNW.

Gareth Evans AC. Of the three existential risks to life as we know it – climate change, pandemics and nuclear weapons – the third is given the least focus. Despite a longstanding taboo against first use of nuclear weapons, there is a high risk. Mistakes, false alarm, and accidents have all occurred, and our luck may run out. Arms control agreements have stalled, and stockpiles have increased. Australia's record is mixed – it has supported non-proliferation and nuclear-free zones; but has not been serious about disarmament. The Canberra Commission (1996) and the Disarmament Commission (2009) initiated by Australia have not been followed up, and we continue to support nuclear deterrence and host joint facilities with US. The focus from now for Australia should be to advocate risk reduction through (a) no first use, (b) reduced deployments, (c) take nuclear weapons off high alert, and (d) decrease the number of weapons to below 2000.

Emeritus Professor Ramesh Thakur (ANU). Despite the Non-Proliferation Treaty (1970) and a ruling of the World Court (1996), the 5 nuclear weapons states have not eliminated their stocks, have modernised them, and used new technologies that increase global risks. Additional states (Israel, India, Pakistan and North Korea) have nuclear weapons. Australia could play a useful role in lessening dangers, by funding the Asia-Pacific Leadership Network for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament. TPNW is not incompatible with ANZUS, but US joint facilities would have to be terminated.

Robert Tickner (former MP). The United Nations began with an aim to eliminate nuclear weapons, but progress has been thwarted by the nuclear weapons states. The TPNW developed from frustration among civil society and non-nuclear states, and follows in the wake of the successful treaties against chemical and biological weapons, land mines and cluster munitions. In each case the first step was to delegitimise the weapons, and the TPNW seeks to do the same. The current Prime Minister Anthony Albanese championed the TPNW at the 2018 Labor Party Conference, and opinion polls show 80% support. Many MPs and Senators have expressed support. Australia can do much to encourage other nations to join by signing up.

Marianne Hanson (Griffith University). There is a mismatch between what Australians want and the inertia of government policies. Research shows a wide range of concern from religious organisations to unionists, youth workers, and medical workers. Rotary and Red Cross have spoken in support of TPNW and challenged the reliance on the nuclear umbrella. Steven Starr (University of Missouri) warns against Australia following the US approach to massive military spending which has led to financial debt and crumbling domestic services. Australia will

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become responsible for large amounts of toxic nuclear waste, and become a target for Russian and Chinese missiles.

Margaret Beavis (ICAN). The health and humanitarian impacts of nuclear weapons have led to the TPNW which represents a paradigm shift in stigmatising nuclear weapons. Australia can follow up its earlier support for international treaties by joining TPNW. Hibakusha. A statement from the Japanese survivors from 1945 affirms the need for progress in nuclear disarmament.

Dr Emily Welty (World Council of Churches). Our religious conviction is to act for peace and to abolish nuclear weapons. WCC has 350 member churches and 580 million constituents. Nuclear deterrence allows a handful of states to possess overwhelming power, and TPNW challenges this status quo. Australian churches are especially aware of the views of Pacific people, are committed to nuclear disarmament, and want the government to sign the treaty.

Sharon Burrow (International Trade Union Confederation). Arms races are dominating national balance sheets and crowding out vital social and environmental outlays. Common security must be based on non-military solutions. Democracy s being undermined by autocratic trends. Trust building, cooperation, and international law are essential to world order and peace. Andrew Dettmer (AMWU) says the union movement supports peace through opposing nuclear weapons and seeking greater nuclear research. Linda Scott (ALGA) reminds us of the local government sector being supportive of nuclear disarmament.

Stuart Rees (Emeritus Professor Sydney University). The Northern Territory has become the centre of extensive military installations that suit the US war goals rather than Australia's interests. Secrecy surrounds much of this, to keep the public in ignorance of the dangers. Promoting peace should be the priority. Anti-China sentiment has been promoted despite China's constitution including provisions for no military alliances, and no threat to use military forces. Compare this with the US military bases around the globe. Foreign interference legislation in Australia is aimed at China but ignores espionage by US, UK and Israel and the transfer of economic assets to US corporate control. Australians need to become more informed about militarisation and to reject foreign policies compliant with UK and US. We need partnerships with countries of our region (including China) about peace education.

Andrew Mack (Evatt Foundation). Given the government's decision on submarines, we need to focus on how to preserve Australian sovereignty in the control of the submarines, to broaden the security dialogue beyond the neo-realist view, and construct a future strategy that expands regional relations and supports Penny Wong's view that neither US nor China should dominate the region. Conflict between US and China is less likely because of their trade and financial interdependence. Australia could foster greater emphasis on non-military relations, as many countries want to be non-aligned.

The full report can be found at www.evatt.org.au

At the Canberra launch of the report (on 1 June), the following suggestions arose from the invited speakers:

- John Falzon (Per Capita). First Nations voices must be heard, as they have borne the brunt of nuclear testing in Australia.

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- Ramesh Thakur. The government needs a nationally-appointed envoy to be responsible for advocating for the TPNW among other nations including nuclear weapons states.
- Sue Wareham (MAPW). Civil society pressure is essential to persuade our politicians to give high priority to nuclear disarmament and supporting the TPNW.

Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)

SIPRI's 2023 Yearbook has been published, showing that the number of operational nuclear weapons started to rise as countries' long term force modernisation and expansion plans progressed. High-level global tension and mistrust have increased the risk of miscalculation, misunderstanding and accident. Nuclear diplomacy and international control need strengthening. See <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2023/states-invest-nuclear-arsenals-geopolitical-relations-deteriorate-new-sipri-yearbook-out-now>

United Nations Commitment

In 2018, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres launched Securing our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament, outlining a vision of disarmament actions that help set our world on a path towards sustainable peace and security for all. The Secretary-General called for fresh perspectives and renewed cooperation, against the backdrop of a deteriorating international security environment, new risks and unfulfilled commitments. His Agenda for Disarmament defines four key pillars with practical measures to be achieved through stronger partnerships and unwavering determination:

- **Disarmament that saves humanity** by endeavouring for a world free of nuclear weapons, strengthening norms against other weapons of mass destruction, and preventing the emergence of new domains of strategic competition and conflict.
- **Disarmament that saves lives** by mitigating the humanitarian impact of conventional arms and addressing the excessive accumulation and illicit trade.
- **Disarmament for future generations** by ensuring responsible innovation and use of advances in science and technology, keeping humans in control of weapons and artificial intelligence, and ensuring peace and stability in cyberspace.
- **Strengthening partnerships for disarmament** by reinvigorating disarmament institutions and processes, engaging regional organisations, ensuring the full and equal participation of women, empowering youth as a force for change, and enhancing participation by civil society and engagement by the private sector.

The Secretary-General's Agenda for Disarmament further recognises the important contribution of disarmament and arms control to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Agenda for Disarmament addresses six different Sustainable Development Goals through nine actions. Disarmament and arms control remain inextricably connected with development in a multitude of ways, providing a unique opportunity to advance both the implementation of the SDGs and the Agenda for Disarmament. See www.un.org/en/observances/disarmament-week/agenda

QPLC encourages Friends to take action and make their concerns known

The situation is perilous, and the delay in Australia signing on to the Treaty on Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) is disturbing. It raises the question of whether the

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government is bowing to pressure from the US to abandon its stated commitment to the treaty. A concerted effort will be needed to make clear that a decision to support the treaty will be a true reflection of the wishes of the community.

- **Approaches can be made to all our political representatives.**
- There is a Parliamentary Friends of the Treaty formed on a non-partisan basis in June 2020 to help press for the government to join the TPNW. This group hosted a visit to Canberra in June 2023 by four advocates for the survivors of atomic tests in the 1950s in central and western Australia, to meet MPs and Senators, as well as Ministers, to urge immediate signing and ratifying of the TPNW. See www.icanw.org.au/parliamentary-statement-on-atomic-survivors-delegation
- **The Parliamentary conveners are:**
Ged Kearney MP (Labor, Vic) Ged.Kearney.MP@aph.gov.au
Ken O'Dowd MP (Liberal-National, Qld) Ken.Odowd.MP@aph.gov.au
Senator Jordan Steele-John (Greens, WA) senator.steele-john@aph.gov.au

Contact details for other MPs and Senators can be found on the Parliament House website www.parliament.gov.au

- Friends may also wish to work alongside the Independent and Peaceful Australia Network (IPAN) in lobbying, given that group's focus on turning around the policies on war and peace, based on the results of a nationwide survey and report of public opinion. See www.ipan.org.au.
- As well as information, ICAN Australia (<https://icanw.org.au/>) has an electronic message which you can send to your MP/Senator immediately : <https://icanw.org.au/action/> and **sample letters** to Parliamentarians <https://icanw.org.au/advocate/>

Canberra, June 2023

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