

WATCHING BRIEF WB18-1: NUCLEAR WEAPONS BAN TREATY

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.

April 2018

This Brief is based on a workshop held by QPLC in Canberra in late March 2018, attended by 20 Quakers from around Australia. The workshop took the nuclear weapons ban treaty as a focus for lobbying politicians at Parliament House on 27 March. The model used for the lobbying process was drawn from the Friends Committee on National Legislation in Washington DC.

Background

Following the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Conference of 2005, where little progress was made towards nuclear disarmament, an initiative started in Australia by the Medical Association for the Prevention of War (MAPW) led to the creation of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) in 2007. The campaign gathered support from non-nuclear weapons states and NGOs, especially the Red Cross, because of its focus on the humanitarian implications of the use of nuclear weapons.

In July 2017 after much preparation the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons by a resolution which 122 countries supported. Along with the nuclear weapons states and some of their allies, Australia opposed the resolution, and played a spoiling role in the lead-up negotiations. Australia continues to claim that its security relies on the US nuclear arsenal – ‘extended nuclear deterrence’.

ICAN has summarized the content of the Treaty as follows:

- Comprehensively bans nuclear weapons and related activity – use, development, testing, production, manufacturing, acquiring, possession, stockpiling, transferring, receiving, threatening to use, stationing, installation, or deploying.
- Bans any assistance with prohibited acts – states not to engage in military preparations and planning to use nuclear weapons, financing their development, or permitting their transfer.
- Creates a path for nuclear states to eliminate weapons, stockpiles and programs.
- Verifies that states meet their obligations and strengthens the safeguards over time.
- Requires victim and international assistance and environmental remediation.

The Nuclear Issue

Sue Wareham (ICAN) made the following points:

- The success of the campaign to ban land mines encouraged the moves to ban nuclear weapons. The risk of nuclear weapons being used is greater than ever.
- The effects of a nuclear weapons explosion are far greater than any other weapon, with dire impact on people, structures and the environment. Rescue efforts would be impossible, and in the longer term a 'nuclear winter' could damage the climate for years.
- Deterrence cannot be 100% reliable and does not allow for accidents, miscalculation or malevolence. In addition, the theory of deterrence could justify any and every country having nuclear weapons.
- The success of the campaign for a treaty reflects the growing concern worldwide that nuclear weapons are unacceptable because of the humanitarian costs of their use.
- The political discourse has changed because of the UN decision to adopt the treaty. It challenges the nuclear weapons states to meet a new standard of behavior. It also exposes the hypocrisy of Australia insisting that North Korea de-nuclearise while Australia relies on nuclear weapons 'protection'.
- Support for the treaty would not have to be at the expense of the Australian alliance with the US.

Further information about ICAN's role and plans can be found at www.ican.org

Jairo Hernandez-Milian (Ambassador for Costa Rica) gave a history of his country, with 5 million people and an independent approach to international affairs. The country has no military forces and has been an active advocate for arms control and disarmament, human rights, international law, sustainable development, and climate change action. Costa Rica is part of the nuclear free zone in Latin America. The ban treaty represents a new global norm that stigmatizes nuclear weapons. In preparation for the treaty, Costa Rica drafted clauses and chaired negotiations along the way. The negotiations were helped by the presence of survivors on nuclear weapons tests and use. Costa Rica continues its work in persuading countries to join the treaty.

Marianne Hanson (International Studies, Queensland University) made the following comments:

- There are currently 15,000 nuclear weapons held by 9 states. The majority are held by USA and Russia (7000 each). Most of these weapons are on high alert. Their use would violate international humanitarian law.
- Chemical and biological weapons (of mass destruction) have been banned, but not nuclear weapons. In fact, the nuclear weapons states are modernising their weapons systems and have refused to take any steps to reduce their holdings.
- There is no such thing as 'goodies' and 'baddies' in the use of nuclear weapons – all such weapons are extremely dangerous in any hands.
- There is increasing awareness that eliminating nuclear weapons is possible. Even cold-war veterans (e.g. Kissinger, Perry) have spoken in favour of this change. Some firms are divesting from nuclear weapons development.
- The treaty is a big advance in the legal basis for abolishing nuclear weapons and takes into account the environmental, gender and indigenous concerns not previously acknowledged.

- The first resolution of the UN General Assembly in 1946 sought the banning of nuclear weapons. It has taken us to this point to see that as an achievable objective.
- Australia's approach to arms control and disarmament lacks consistency – it has done some good things but also sometimes undermined international efforts. It is faced with a new situation where it will be ostracized for standing outside the treaty, and where even some of the other US allies are seriously contemplating signing on to the new treaty.
- The abundance of effective conventional weapons worldwide provides more than sufficient defence capability, and nuclear weapons are not needed.
- Most Australians support moves to ban nuclear weapons. A 2014 Nielsen poll showed that support to be at 84%. Neighbouring countries in SE Asia support the treaty.
- The Liberal Party has supported initiatives such as the International Criminal Court, the strengthening of International Humanitarian Law, and the Land mines treaty. The ALP has policies supporting disarmament and is facing a motion at the forthcoming July national conference to support signing the treaty. The Greens support the treaty.

Robert Tickner (former MP and CEO of Australian Red Cross) spoke of his longstanding opposition to nuclear weapons, and his support for nuclear free zones. He pointed out that New Zealand has taken a strong position in support of the treaty. The ALP has been supportive in general but has been unwilling to press harder for this step. Some 66% of Labor Parliamentarians have signed the ICAN pledge in favour of the treaty. But the leader Bill Shorten and the Shadow Foreign Minister Penny Wong have not so far. He urged Quakers to be active in keeping the pressure on ALP representatives to support the conference motion which speaks of the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of the use of nuclear weapons and welcomes the growing global movement for their banning.

Anu Mundkur (Australian Council for International Development) looked at the wider context of peacebuilding, and made the following points:

- By 2030 50% of the poor will be in areas of conflict and fragility. Aid has tended to go to fragile areas to prevent this. Agenda 2030 (the Sustainable Development Goals) recognizes the essential value of peace to enable development.
- Aid helps improve life and reduce grievances that lead to conflict. In post-conflict situations, aid strengthens the capacity of governments to deliver services. Australian aid goes largely to rebuilding infrastructure and enhancing political structures.
- The recent decision by the Government to promote arms sales is an example of the gap between peacebuilding policy and other priorities. Our reputation as an honest broker is also compromised by our border protection policies. The link between international policy and domestic policy needs to be acknowledged more.
- We lack a coordinated peacebuilding strategy as part of our foreign policy. Australia is less connected to UN peacekeeping work these days. We don't do enough 'positive peace' in the sense of nonviolent ways to reduce conflict. There is a tendency to think first of military responses. Women are not included as much they should be as mediators, signatories and negotiators. Peace agreements tend to last longer and be more comprehensive when women are involved in developing them.
- The Women, Peace and Security agenda is about prevention participation, relief/recovery, and protection. 73 countries have national action plans, but Australia's is rudimentary and is to be reviewed later this year.
- The priorities should be – conflict prevention, domestic peace agenda, resourcing civil society spaces, and a collaborative approach to peace and security.

Molly Harriss-Olsen (CEO Fair Trade Australia) addressed the theme of 'truth to power'. She outlined the challenges posed by changing social and economic conditions and

spoke of her own experience of deciding to join the US sustainability program initiated by President Clinton. That program involved inventing ways to build consensus about what could be done, and to enable people from different approaches to learn from each other. The Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the UN represent a significant breakthrough and support the work of groups like Fair Trade.

Advocacy and Lobbying

Quakers have worked to influence government throughout our history. This has been consistent with a commitment to ‘take away the occasion of war’ and to social justice, and has involved nonviolent action of many kinds. Sometimes we have been imprisoned for our beliefs and action in following the leadings of the Spirit. Advocacy rather than revolution has been the primary method, emerging from a profound belief of ‘that of God in every one’. In this context, lobbying is seen as a spiritual practice – a way to talk to another human being regardless of who they are and what they think.

Margaret Clark (Canberra Quakers and QPLC) introduced the sessions on Quaker lobbying by referring to the work done by the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL). Based in Washington DC, FCNL prepares Quakers from around the USA to learn lobbying and to take part in periodic lobbying days with a focus on a particular concern (that has emerged from listening to Quaker voices around the country). A ‘road map’ is used as a template for preparing for the visit to politicians. The aim is to meet as many members of Congress and the Senate, and their staff, as possible. Specific requests are made on the agreed concern, responses noted, and follow-up carried out.

Margaret gave handouts on Lobbying 101, tips for lobbyists, and guidelines for letter-writing to media etc. She offered ideas on how to find out about the background and likely views of the politicians to be visited. MPs and Senators had been identified because they had some connection with the Quaker participants (e.g. from same State). Groups of three or four then worked together on the nuclear weapons issue and how they would approach the person to be met. Role playing was part of this preparation. Within each group there was a leader, a note-taker and a story-teller. The question to be asked was agreed by the whole group – “will you support Australia signing the nuclear weapons ban treaty?” This basic ‘ask’ was supplemented by specific requests depending on which political party the politician represented.

Margaret spoke as a public servant on her experience as a policy-writer receiving requests from many quarters. She emphasised the importance of being well prepared when speaking to politicians or bureaucrats. Public servants keep good records of meetings held and will be influenced by the strength of the case you make and the way it is presented. They can help set up meetings with ministers. Making a good impression helps create opportunities for future consultation.

Adrian Glamorgan (WA Quakers) recalled his experience working to stop the Franklin Dam in Tasmania. He said that initial lobbying did not work, so protest action was taken at the site using nonviolent action. This eventually led to success. He reflected on the range of success of different campaigns since (e.g. conservation, overseas aid). He stressed the need to be focused on what is sought and not be diverted.

Lorel Thomas (Victorian Quakers) said she had be ‘thrown into’ lobbying, as an advocate for the Safe Ground movement which seeks to minimize the impact of war. It arose from

campaigns seeking to remove unexploded ordnance after the war in Cambodia. She learned to speak publicly and to lobby Parliamentarians about the land mines ban. Most campaigns require endurance and persistence and require creative tactics. She identified a series of steps – awareness leads to interest leads to action leads to outcomes.

Conclusion

The participants at the workshop spent their final day at Parliament House meeting with those MPs and Senators and advisers who had agreed to do so. They were well received and able to present their case even in a short time available. The feedback from these meetings was given to QPLC to follow up. A separate *Action Alert* (18.2) has been prepared to suggest immediate avenues for action by Quakers and others to advance the cause of getting Australia to support the nuclear weapons ban treaty. The commitment to achieve this has been strengthened by this experience.

Canberra
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