

Sub 1 – People for Nuclear Disarmament for WA – 29 September 2016

Dear JSCT members:

Submission from People for Nuclear Disarmament, W.A.
Treaty re. Uranium sales to Ukraine

It is alarming to our organisation that the Australian Government is entering into a treaty arrangement with Ukraine to sell uranium to that country.

Only a few years ago, we were concerned about the treaty to sell uranium to Russia, to which we objected strongly, and which trade is now suspended. Has the Government not noticed that these two countries are at war? It is not sensible to be selling uranium to either country, in any circumstance, in our view, but especially now, as it could be construed by the Russians as siding with Ukraine. Hardly in our diplomatic interests.

A new country, seeking to establish itself on the international stage, and attempting governance of difficult factions within its own borders, let alone the obvious de-stabilisation which is occurring outside its immediate borders, is not a good destination for highly fissile material, with radioactive contaminants inbuilt.

In the preamble to the agreement, there is much mention of all the international agreements already signed by both Ukraine and Australia, with constant reference to the International Atomic Energy Agency, as the arbiter and standard setter for the transport and use of nuclear materials. The IAEA is under-funded, under resourced, unable to fulfil its many duties, which include promotion and well as monitoring of the nuclear industry globally. It can barely carry out routine inspections of nuclear facilities, let alone make unannounced spot checks to ensure compliance with regulations. It is like putting the fox in charge of the chicken coup.

Looking at the various Articles in the proposed Treaty, we find many causes for concern. Just to mention a few:

Article V nuclear safety clause, relying on commitments given to and monitored by the IAEA : totally inadequate, in our view.

Article VII regarding transfers to third parties - fine as long as both parties agree in writing, which means they can move nuclear materials anywhere, as long as both countries sign.

Article VIII confidentiality clause - this agreement does not require transfer of any information outside their respective international agreements, national laws and regulations provide for – in other words, no transparency required.

Article IX ...enrichment and re-processing: sections 1a and 1b allow for enrichments with written consent of both parties - any limitations can be altered by mutual agreement between parties.

Article XI on safeguards: if there's a failure to administer safeguard the parties shall immediately arrange a new safeguards system, and shall consult with and assist each other. This is meaningless

garbage. There are no real checks on safeguards, no sanctions for breach of agreements. And everything relies on the inadequate oversight of the IAEA.

Of course there is no mention of nuclear waste. How is Ukraine going to deal with that? Well, as we know, there is no country on earth (not even Finland, which has spent years and billions of dollars on trying to ensure safe, deep storage) which has an answer to this, which is a good reason for leaving that touchy issue out of the Treaty. Which begs the question: why is Australia considering expanding the uses of nuclear materials, which are inherently dangerous, and increasingly becoming outmoded.

The nuclear industry is in its dying throes. The amount of energy generated by nuclear power stations is globally falling, year by year. Nuclear reactors are being de-commissioned faster than new ones are being built, year by year. Renewable energy is rapidly taking up the slack, and very soon will preclude any perceived need for nuclear power. It is highly cynical for Australian uranium mining companies and the Australian Government to continue to push this industry which has caused so much damage in various parts of the world from nuclear testing (the Pacific, Tibet, Australia, northern Africa, U.S.A.) to bombings (Japan, and only from the armoury of the U.S.A.) to major accidents in nuclear reactors (U.S.A., Russia, Japan,). How much more proof is needed for the world to reject this technology which is a failure of the 20th century? It has been trying to find solutions to its radioactive contaminated waste for over seventy years. In our highly technological era, this must be considered a failure.

The Australian Government would be wise not to enter into any new contracts for uranium sales, and to let existing contracts run their courses until this industry has finally run its course.

Wishing you well in your deliberations.

Jo Vallentine, co-convenor, People for Nuclear Disarmament W.A.