

SUBMISSION TO THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON TREATIES
INQUIRY INTO NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION AND DISARMAMENT
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from Michele Madigan

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Please note that I have been granted an extension by phone permission, late January 2009

SUBMISSION

In the current world crisis of wars in many regions, water at a premium, global warming a frightening current reality and the fears about the economic world crisis, it is more than appropriate that the Joint Standing Committee of this Parliament is conducting an Inquiry into the vital issue of Nuclear Non- proliferation and Disarmament.

Australia with its stocks and export trade of uranium has of course a serious responsibility to any re-examination of the question. Uranium is in fact the only energy source with a direct and repeatedly demonstrated connection to the proliferation of WMD. It is unsurprising therefore in these times of world insecurity and conflict as outlined above, that the price of uranium continues to remain steady. The average citizen is probably unaware all the same that uranium sales with the high risk and responsibility which their export involves Australia, brings in just one third of 1% of Australia's total export revenue

I note that the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties has previously recommended that stringent conditions be met before the treaty which would have allowed uranium sales to Russia is ratified. It is to hoped – to state the obvious- that this desire for the funds from the export of uranium to Russia and other countries will be well balanced by Committee Members with the facts that the safeguards that the proponents of the industry tend to unrealistically rely on the ability of the IAEA to inspect and regulate and in any concrete way ensure that 'safeguards' are a reality.

It is well known that the **Director General of the IAEA International Atomic Energy Agency himself– is only too aware of the serious limitations of his role and agency.** He likens budget of the agency commissioned to ensure nuclear safeguards are kept on a world wide basis to that of 'a local police station' It has no authority of ability to prevent nuclear weapons proliferation. The best it can do is to detect diversion of nuclear materials – after the event. It would surprise many Australians to realise for example that there are no safeguards guaranteed at all in Russia. The IAEA have not carried out a safeguards inspection in that country since 2001. All the more serious in that incidents of theft from Russian nuclear sites are common.

The 5th term of reference set the current Committee is to find how it can contribute to the work of the International Commission on Nuclear non – proliferation and Disarmament(NPT). I put to the Committee that one significant way that this can be achieved is by severely regulating Australia's contribution to the nuclear cycle. Our country has 40% of the known world's uranium deposits. Experienced members of the committee will only be too aware that even if Australia's uranium is not used directly to fuel nuclear weapons in the countries we currently export to – and the IAEA itself admits it is impossible to detect this – then the Australian

uranium frees up the local or other imported uranium to do just that .

There is much scope for our country Australia via the work of this Committee's recommendations to contribute to world Nuclear Non- proliferation as Australia presently has uranium export agreements with 4 of the 'declared' nuclear weapons states (USA, UK, China and France). **None of these countries are currently complying with their disarmament obligations under the NPT.** Also agreements with countries like South Korea and Taiwan which have a history of weapons- related research based on their civil nuclear programmes. Also with some of these same countries like the USA who at least up till now, have been blocking progress on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

Nor is the answer to simply pressing to get the countries of the world better funding of the IAEA. All but the most enthusiastic proponents of the nuclear industry will admit that nuclear weapons programmes can be fuelled by such small amounts of fuel that **adequate tracking is humanly impossible.**

Australia's uranium has to date resulted in the production of over 114 tonnes of plutonium – sufficient for 11,000 nuclear weapons. If just 0.1% of this becomes written off as Material Unaccounted For (MUF) then that is sufficient for 11 plutonium bombs similar to that which destroyed Nagasaki. Non proliferation of the fuel is as essential as pressing for non proliferation of the weapons. In Australia we are in a unique position to contribute in this.

With these aims in mind **it is my hope also that the work of this Standing Committee will lead to our own relevant Australian agencies to be much more stringent, professional and truthful in their own standards** making our own direct contribution to world health and safety and thereby of course also setting an example to other countries.

Unfortunately **our own Australian Safeguards and Non- proliferation Office is such an agency.**

- In 2007 ASNO misled the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties as it claimed that safeguards would **ensure** Australian uranium is not used for weapons production in Russia even though as quoted above there have been no weapons safeguards inspections in Russia since 2001.
- It is clear that the claims of ASNO that Australia sells to countries with 'impeccable' non-proliferation credentials has no basis whatsoever on evidence readily available i.e. on simply naming the countries involved - notably China.
- Nor is there any basis for its claim that all the Australian- Obligated Nuclear Weapons Material (AONM) – primarily uranium and its by products- is 'fully accounted for' when there are no Australia inspections of such. Therefore Australia must rely on the partial and underfunded inspection system on the IAEA whose own Director (as above) admits the agency is incapable of this.

I conclude by wishing the Members of the Committee well in this their important task of actively assisting the Australian Government contribute more effectively to the treaties and agencies dealing with the enormously significant task of Nuclear Non- proliferation and Disarmament.

Thank you for the chance to contribute by making a submission.

Michele Madigan

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