

SUBMISSION TO JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON TREATIES:

RE: AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT OF AUSTRALIA AND
THE GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA ON THE
TRANSFER OF NUCLEAR MATERIAL

Dated April 3, 2006.

From : People for Nuclear Disarmament, Western Australia.

To Whom It May Concern:

Despite a ten page document containing fifteen articles and including five annexes, this treaty is extremely troubling in that it cannot guarantee anything about the way in which Australia's uranium will be used in China.

Of course there is attention paid to China's membership of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (which is so weak nowadays as to be almost useless, due to major Nuclear Weapons States openly ignoring their obligations, particularly under Article 6), but that is hardly a confidence builder. China is a nuclear weapons state with nuclear ambitions beyond the provision of energy generated by nuclear power.

I want to pay attention to five major points:

1. the inability to separate Australia's uranium ore from ore from any other sources, including China's existing domestic supplies;
2. the possibility of Australia's uranium being used for nuclear weapons research and proliferation;
3. the secretive nature of the Chinese state, precluding citizen watchdog organisations;
4. China's appalling human rights and environmental records;
5. The unresolved issue of dealing with waste from existing and planned nuclear power stations.

1. No separation of Australia's uranium ore:

In China where the state has full control of energy resources, and where the state is also the agency conducting nuclear weapons experiments/expansion, there is no separation of nuclear materials. It is easier to manage all nuclear materials under one umbrella. It is not only China where that is the case. In France, where the state also controls nuclear energy and nuclear weapons, there is a crossover of facilities, where lines are not drawn between civilian and military uses of nuclear materials. It is simply easier to manage that way, and cheaper than having to set up completely separate plants for the separate outcomes. This was proven conclusively when in 1987 Senators Sanders and Vallentine, and MHR Peter Milton, made representations in both houses of Parliament, which could not be contradicted by the Government of the day, that the French plant at Tricastin

served both civilian and military sectors. In other words, Australian uranium which may have been intended for “peaceful purposes” was directly being used in a military operation.

Once the ore is gassified, there is no separation molecule for molecule, there is no labelling to say that this uranium oxide is derived from Australia, therefore it cannot be used in any stream of activity which could result in nuclear weapons. The enrichment programmes and the use of plutonium from spent fuel rods derive from the power plants which generate nuclear energy. Nuclear weapons cannot be produced without those processes having taken place. Where is it written that China will have completely separate facilities for producing power, from those producing plutonium for weapons grade material? Even if this were written, it could not be guaranteed.

2. **Australian uranium could therefore be used in the production of China’s nuclear weapons.** Even if, on paper, China could demonstrate that amounts of ore going into and out of civilian reactors did not amount to what they were using for their military operations, it is true to say, that on a purely quantitative basis, the infusion of Australian uranium into the Chinese system, would free up other sources for use in their military programmes. The International Atomic Energy Agency (which both monitors and promotes the nuclear industry globally —a conflict of interest if there ever was one!) cannot possibly identify separate tracks in China’s nuclear operations. For a start, it doesn’t have enough resources to carry out comprehensive, unannounced, frequent inspections. And the Chinese aren’t exactly welcoming of such inspections. So, despite “safeguards” it is my contention that there are no guarantees that Australian uranium will not facilitate China’s nuclear weapons programme. That is a very serious charge.

3. I think we know enough about China’s society and government to understand that **non-government organisations are not in any position to act as watchdogs on government operations.** Although an organisation like Greenpeace exists in China, it cannot work on controversial issues which counter state policies or operations. Recently, Lo Sze Ping, campaign and communications director for Greenpeace in Beijing said “I’m sorry, I will not be able to help you because this is a no-go area for NGO’s” to reporter SholtoMacpherson (The Diplomat, August/September, 2006). The undemocratic nature of Chinese society is such that the Government can get away with bad practices. Can you imagine citizen enquiries/hearings about the siting of the many proposed nuclear power plants which China plans to build? Or about standards for worker health and safety? Or the procedures for plant operations being scrutinised by an independent body? If Australia sells uranium to China, we must understand that we are condemning its people to further human rights abuses. These will be the result of bad practices which could lead to terrible accidents causing dreadful cancers.

4. **China’s appalling human rights and environmental records** do not inspire confidence. By Amnesty International’s reckoning, China executes from 4,000 – 6,000 of its citizens each year under the death penalty for certain crimes. Committee members must also be aware of the allegations about trading in body parts which have recently been revealed in relation to members of the Falun Gong movement, about 2,000 deaths recorded. Thousands die in China’s unsafe coalmines each year – another 6,000 or so. It seems that life is cheap when there is a head count of billions.

But that doesn't make it right, and Australia should not be adding to those grizzly possibilities by selling an inherently dangerous substance to a country with such a dismal record. Major industrial accidents happen on a weekly basis in China, with state-owned enterprises enjoying virtual immunity from prosecution. (Sholto Macpherson, op.cit.). Under current practice, environmental concerns are filed and ignored by provincial governments - only half of 500 waste water plants built recently are operating because it is cheaper for local officials to dump the waste rather than treat it. Does that auger well for the treatment of nuclear waste?

6. **Unresolved issue of nuclear waste:** China is not alone on this one! Not one country anywhere on planet earth has yet figured out what to do with its radioactive waste, live for anything up to 250,000 years! This is a global issue, certainly, but no excuse for letting the Chinese Government, or any other proponents of nuclear power, anywhere, off the hook. Yucca Mountain, the much touted United States depository, remains unfinished, unstable, unusable. The French, the Germans, the Japanese, the British, just to mention the most frequent users/most advanced technological states, cannot figure out what to do with their nuclear waste. This is after sixty years of massive effort and billions of dollars worth of research and development money, coughed up by governments on behalf of their taxpayers. This is a total failure of the nuclear industry. In our highly technologically charged societies, what other industry is still in business, daring to promote itself as an answer to global warming, when it fails test number one - being able to safely dispose of its own waste. There will be increasing pressure on Australia to take the world's nuclear waste as other countries' contaminated waste piles mount to totally unmanageable, unsafe levels. If we continue to sell uranium, regardless of the consequences, just for quick profit, we might deserve what comes back to us. We can only take the high moral ground on this issue by refusing to mine, mill, or export uranium. Being in the business already is no excuse for continuing with an industry which is so potentially damaging to future generations.

Wishing you well in your deliberations.

Yours sincerely,

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