

A submission by the Peace Organisation of Australia to the JSCOT inquiry into nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament

JANUARY 2009

Dear Committee,

The Peace Organisation of Australia (POA) thanks the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties (JSCOT) for the opportunity to contribute to its inquiry into nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, an issue of paramount importance to Australia and the world. We hope that the primary purpose of the inquiry is to build momentum for the worldwide elimination of nuclear weapons. We consider this to be a near-term political goal, not a distant dream.

POA is a non-profit, non-religious organisation committed to promoting peace through education, lobbying and direct action. We are a partner organisation of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons and have contributed to public debate on how best to move towards a nuclear-weapon-free world. We have also expressed opposition to nuclear power because of concerns we have about proliferation.

For this inquiry, we wish to make the following recommendations and observations:

1. Under the Howard Government, Australia's involvement in negotiations for nuclear disarmament was minimal. In the UN General Assembly and at meetings of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), we demonstrated only half-hearted support for the cause. The situation appears to have changed for the better under the Rudd Government, which has on numerous occasions expressed support for the abolition of nuclear weapons. We welcome this positive shift.
2. In particular, POA welcomes the establishment by Australia and Japan of the International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, an initiative we consider useful not only in preparing states for the 2010 Review Conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), but also in encouraging them to look beyond the existing nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament regime for solutions to the current stalemate in negotiations.

3. We remind the Rudd Government of its pre-election promise to drive the global agenda for a legally binding nuclear weapons convention (NWC), as proposed by non-government organisations and promoted most fervently by Costa Rica and Malaysia. We note that support among nations for the immediate commencement of negotiations on such a treaty has grown considerably in recent years, and that last year a model NWC submitted to the United Nations received the backing of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.
4. We express concern that last year, as in previous years, Australia abstained from voting on a UN General Assembly resolution calling for negotiations on an NWC as a follow-up to the 1996 advisory opinion by the International Court of Justice on the legality of the threat and use of nuclear weapons. We urge the government to change its position. An NWC, we believe, would help states to fulfil their obligations under Article VI of the NPT, thereby strengthening the ailing treaty rather than undermining it.
5. POA is deeply concerned about the role that Australia plays in guaranteeing the continued existence of nuclear weapons by supplying nuclear-armed nations with Australian uranium. Australia should immediately cease the export of uranium to any country with nuclear weapons, whether or not it is a party to the NPT, and should work to phase out the mining of uranium altogether.
6. Finally, POA calls on Australia to cease to rely on the so-called protection of the extended nuclear deterrence provided by the United States. By sheltering under America's nuclear umbrella, we add weight and credence to the false belief that nuclear weapons bring security. Australia must take a bold stance and reject the umbrella, just as New Zealand did in the 1980s. Unless we do so, no state will consider us a credible disarmament champion.

We thank you once again for the opportunity to participate in this important inquiry, and would be delighted to appear before the committee at a public hearing.

Yours sincerely



Tim Wright
President
Peace Organisation of Australia