

## Submission to Joint Standing Committee on Treaties Inquiry into Proposed Uranium Sales to China

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Friends of the Earth Adelaide welcomes the opportunity to offer a submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties regarding the proposed Agreement to export uranium to the People's Republic of China. Friends of the Earth Adelaide is opposed to the export of uranium to China for the reasons described below.

### Public opposition

Firstly, Friends of the Earth Adelaide would like to highlight that the majority of Australians remain opposed to any expansion of the nuclear industry or exports in this country. A Newspoll conducted on May 30 2006 showed that 77 percent of Australians remain opposed to the expansion of uranium mining, including clear majorities in all political parties. In September 2005, SBS commissioned a Newspoll which concluded that 53 percent of Australians opposed exporting uranium to China, with only 31 percent in favour. In this context, it is apparent that any expansion of the nuclear industry that the Federal Government seeks goes against the wishes of the majority of their electorate.

### Regional tensions

Nuclear power is the only energy source with a direct link to weapons manufacture, amply demonstrated in the numerous examples of supposedly 'peaceful' nuclear programs being used to develop nuclear arsenals in countries such as Israel, India, Pakistan and possibly North Korea. In the context of uranium exports to China, this link is intensified. *The Bulletin* reported in February 2006 that there was "growing alarm" over Australia's negotiations with China, felt particularly keenly in Taipei. The Secretary-General of Taiwan's National Security Council, Professor Parris Chang stated that "Australia could become an unwitting 'accomplice' in China's nuclear weapons program and should not trust Beijing's assurances that its nuclear energy and weapons programs are distinct"<sup>1</sup>.

*The Bulletin* goes on to quote an unnamed figure involved in the Beijing-Canberra negotiations as saying, "The bottom line is that China has enough uranium supplies for power or weapons, but not both"<sup>2</sup>. This situation was confirmed by none other than China's Ambassador to Australia, Madame Fu Ying in *The Australian* in December 2005, stating that, "While [China] had enough uranium resources to support its nuclear weapons program, Madame Fu said China would need to import uranium to meet its power demands"<sup>3</sup>. Even if it was possible to fully safeguard the use of Australian uranium, in this context such safeguards become irrelevant as Australian uranium essentially frees up China's own stockpiles to expand its nuclear arsenal.

The expansion of China's nuclear arsenal is a prospect to be cautious about. In 2005, Zhu Chenghu, a general in China's People's Liberation Army remarked that, "if the Americans draw their missiles and position-guided ammunition on the target zone of China's territory, I think we will have to respond with nuclear weapons... We, Chinese, will prepare ourselves for the destruction of all the cities east of Xian. Of course, the Americans will have to be prepared that hundreds of cities will be destroyed by the Chinese"<sup>4</sup>.

Such warnings are especially disturbing in the context of ongoing tensions between Taiwan and China. On September 8, 2006, *The Age* reported that China was apparently "aiming missiles" at Taiwan "in readiness for an invasion", triggering calls for the United Nations to intervene and call discussions between the two parties<sup>5</sup>. In response, Chinese diplomat Liu Pei remarked that "there is but one China in the world and that Taiwan is an inseparable part of the People's Republic of China", and that the UN has no role in resolving this "internal matter"<sup>6</sup>.

### Inadequate and ineffective safeguards

John Carlson, director of the Australian Safeguards and Non-proliferation Office (ASNO), admitted in *The Age* that "Australians will not inspect Chinese nuclear facilities to ensure compliance with controls safeguarding non-proliferation", nor will international inspectors "visit enrichment or conversion facilities in China to ensure Australian uranium did not end up in nuclear weapons"<sup>7</sup>. Furthermore, as one of the five

<sup>1</sup> Daley, P 2006, 'New China Syndrome', *The Bulletin*, February 7 2006, p. 24

<sup>2</sup> Daley, P 2006, 'New China Syndrome', *The Bulletin*, February 7 2006, p. 25

<sup>3</sup> *The Australian* 2005, 'China warning on uranium', December 2 2005

<sup>4</sup> Daley, P 2006, 'New China Syndrome', *The Bulletin*, February 7 2006, p. 24

<sup>5</sup> *The Age* 2006, 'China "aiming missiles at Taiwan"', September 8 2006, <http://www.theage.com.au/news/World/China-aiming-missiles-at-Taiwan/2006/09/08/1157222298080.html>

<sup>6</sup> *The Age* 2006, 'China "aiming missiles at Taiwan"', September 8 2006, <http://www.theage.com.au/news/World/China-aiming-missiles-at-Taiwan/2006/09/08/1157222298080.html>

<sup>7</sup> *The Age* 2006, '\$250m uranium sales to China', September 5 2006

'original nuclear weapons states', inspections of China's nuclear weapons facilities by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) are not compulsory. Even if such inspections were compulsory for China, it would be cold comfort given Director-General of the IAEA Mohamed El-Baradei's remarks that the Agency's inspection rights are "fairly limited" and that the safeguards scheme operates on a "shoestring budget", "comparable to a local police department".

Indeed, to add to this, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty itself is in a delicate position. The 2004 UN Report by the Secretary General's High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change warns that "the nuclear non-proliferation regime is now at risk because of a lack of compliance with existing commitments, withdrawal or threats of withdrawal from the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons to escape those commitments, a changing international security environment and the diffusion of technology. We are approaching a point at which the erosion of the non-proliferation regime could become irreversible and result in a cascade of proliferation"<sup>8</sup>. Such a collapse of the Treaty would render any 'safeguards' meaningless.

Prime Minister John Howard has conceded that ultimately Australia must trust the Chinese regime to not use Australian uranium in nuclear weapons. Given China's record of weapons dealing and human rights abuse, this requires a massive leap of faith for the Australian public. China refuses to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), with the 2002 US Posture Review referring to China's "ongoing modernisation" of its nuclear and non-nuclear forces. In 2001, the CIA revealed that China traded missile technology to North Korea and Libya, as well as providing "extensive support" to Pakistan's nuclear program. As the US Government highlighted in 2003, China sold weapons technology to Iran, and according to Amnesty International, exhibits an "irresponsible" and "dangerously permissive approach" to trading in arms to known abusers of human rights (including, according to Amnesty, Iran, Pakistan, Myanmar and Sudan).

Under China's current regime, the protections and transparency associated with a vibrant civil society would be absent. The example of Chinese nuclear whistleblower Sun Xiaodi is an especially chilling illustration of this; Sun Xiaodi was abducted in April 2005 and detained for eight months after expressing his concerns about environmental contamination at a Chinese uranium mine to a foreign journalist<sup>9</sup>. According to Amnesty International, China conducts 80 percent of the world's executions – 1,770 executions were reported in 2005, although a Chinese legal expert suggests the figure to be more realistically closer to 8,000<sup>10</sup>, coupled with ongoing reports of state-administered torture and heavy-handed repression of freedom of expression<sup>11</sup>. Additionally, Reporters Without Borders places China at 159 out of 167 in the world for press freedom, citing "government repression" as preventing the media from operating freely<sup>12</sup>. Ongoing state repression against dissidents and the media hardly creates a climate for the kind of vigorous monitoring and transparency required to ensure not only that Australian uranium is not diverted into nuclear weapons, but that China's entire nuclear industry is as "safe" as possible. Indeed, as nuclear energy expert Wang Yi, from Beijing's Chinese Academy of Sciences commented to *The New York Times* in January 2005, "we don't have very good plans for dealing with spent fuel, and we don't have very good emergency plans for dealing with catastrophe".

For the reasons listed above, Friends of the Earth Adelaide strongly opposes the Federal Government's plans to export uranium to China. Friends of the Earth believes that such a move would exacerbate regional tensions, and that the 'safe' - let alone 'peaceful' – use of Australian uranium in China is impossible to guarantee. As Professor Parris Chang stated, "Australia also ought to place a great emphasis on the peace and security of the South-East Asia area. In recent years, we have noticed that Australia has almost east-tilted towards China because of trade considerations ... really, peace and security in East Asia would be very important"<sup>13</sup>.

In this regard, Friends of the Earth Adelaide encourages the Federal Government to support instead the export of safe, renewable technologies to support China's energy needs.

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<sup>8</sup> UN Secretary General's High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change 2004, 'A more secure world: our shared responsibility', United Nations, p. 39

<sup>9</sup> Human Rights in China 2006, 'Environmental activist Sun Xiaodi detained again', April 7 2006, <http://www.hrichina.org/public/contents/press?revision%5fid=27547&item%5fid=27545>

<sup>10</sup> Amnesty International 2006, 'The death penalty in 2005: China', Amnesty International, <http://web.amnesty.org/pages/dp2005-china-eng>

<sup>11</sup> Amnesty International 2005, 'China: Report 2005', Amnesty International, <http://web.amnesty.org/report2005/chn-summary-eng>

<sup>12</sup> Reporters Without Borders 2005, 'Worldwide Press Freedom Index 2005', Reporters Without Borders, [http://www.rsf.org/IMG/pdf/CM\\_2005\\_As\\_Eng.pdf](http://www.rsf.org/IMG/pdf/CM_2005_As_Eng.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Daley, P 2006, 'New China Syndrome', *The Bulletin*, February 7 2006, p. 24