

Submission to Joint Standing Committee on Treaties Inquiry into Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament

13 March 2009

Mr Kelvin Thompson
Chair, Joint Standing Committee on Treaties
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Thompson

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties - Inquiry into Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament. I apologise that this submission is a late one; I have been overseas for some time (unexpectedly) and therefore was not able to make an earlier submission. I hope that nevertheless my submission might still be considered by the Committee. My comments below are in reference to the first, second, third and fifth Terms of Reference listed.

Submission

I welcome the Australian government's timely Inquiry into nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. Former Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans recently identified the danger of a nuclear strike or accident, resulting from the retention of almost 26,000 nuclear weapons and the possible proliferation of such weapons to other states, as one of the three most important crises facing the globe today. The other two were the effects of climate change and the global economic crisis. I would add a further – and long standing – crisis: that of chronic poverty and underdevelopment in many parts of the world, resulting in the preventable deaths from hunger and disease of around 40,000 persons every day. I believe that all four of these issues are, to some extent, connected to each other. For instance:

- Climate change is encouraging a greater uptake of the nuclear energy option, which in turn has the potential to increase weapons proliferation in a greater number of states than currently exist;
- The economic crisis alerts us to the massive spending in military budgets that has occurred at a global level. In 2007, for example, US\$1,339 billion was spent on military expenditure.¹ By contrast, only US\$135 billion would be needed to meet all the targets of UN's Millennium Development Goals.
- Clearly a reduction in military budgets, especially the high costs of maintaining nuclear arsenals, would relieve those countries which possess these weapons;

All this is by way of introduction to my submission and a number of recommendations I would like to make in it. My overwhelming point is that Australia must continue to work strongly with its allies and others to move towards a world without nuclear weapons.

The arguments in favour of eliminating nuclear weapons have been well-rehearsed, and there is no need for me to reiterate them here. Rather, I will be attaching with my email an article I published recently which outlines the case for eliminating nuclear weapons.² It considers the alleged benefits of possession of these weapons and goes on to show that against the range of threats they are designed to deter or respond to, nuclear weapons are in fact un-useable. What is more, their retention invites proliferation by other states, as well as the dangers of inadvertent or deliberate use.

I strongly support the Australian government's initiative in launching the International Commission on Nuclear Nonproliferation and Disarmament (ICNND), and believe that this, together with sustained support from Canberra can make a real difference in leading to the elimination of nuclear weapons.

I am currently engaged in a research project, funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, that examines the work of the Commission, and seeks to raise public awareness about its goals. Without a high level of visible public support, the full potential of this Commission might never be reached.

In light of the above then, I would like to make the following recommendations to the Committee:

Recommendation One:

That the Australian government continues to work strongly at the national and international levels to promote non-proliferation and the abolition of nuclear weapons. This should be done by continuing to support the existing system of treaties currently in place which work towards these ends. In particular, Australia should focus on retaining the integrity of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

To this effect, Australia can:

- Encourage the existing nuclear weapon states to fulfil their obligations under Article VI.
- Examine ways in which Article X can be strengthened so that withdrawal from the NPT can be made more costly to states contemplating such an option.
- Encourage the United States to work more closely with India in order to gain more concessions from India regarding monitoring of its nuclear facilities and its signature to the CTBT. The US-India deal was in my view a mistake, on balance, and damaged the integrity of the NPT. However, there is much that the US can still do to extract a maximum return from India in exchange for its continuation with the deal. Australia can work directly with the US and India to encourage this outcome.

Recommendation Two:

That the Australian government work closely with the new US Administration of President Barack Obama to strengthen measures aimed at reversing the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Measures could include:

- Strongly supporting, and offering to assist in, negotiations between the US, North Korea and Iran. That the new Administration is willing to work directly with these regimes is a refreshing change from the shaming and threatening stance chosen by the previous US government, which was counter-productive. This is not to imply that these regimes should be rewarded for their behaviour, but rather to suggest a more pragmatic approach which focuses on security guarantees, and in the case of Iran, a commitment on the part of the US to work for a nuclear weapons free zone in the Middle East.

Recommendation Three:

That the Australian government places all necessary diplomatic and material resources in the way of the ICNND to enable it to achieve its objectives. There are at least three things that I believe the government and/or the Commission can do to enhance the ICNND's effectiveness:

- To convene a high profile national conference on the importance of eliminating nuclear weapons, to which specialists, NGOs, academics and other representatives of the public could be invited. This will do much to promote civil society engagement with the government and the Commission.
- To work proactively to ensure that the Commission's reports do not face the same disappointing fate that the Report of the Canberra Commission faced in 1996, where, with a change of government, the document was treated with, at best, indifference on the part of the incoming government. (This was done not so much on the basis that the new government disagreed with the content of the Report, but rather because it wanted to distance itself in every way from the previous government.) The issue of nuclear weapons is too important and too relevant to all parties and persons, to be treated in such a way. Options include seeking Australian bipartisan support ahead of the Commission's conclusions being released publicly, presenting it personally to the governments of the existing nuclear weapon states, encouraging the governments of other states to endorse the ICNND and continue with its work, and to promote it at the highest levels of international organisation, including the United Nations.
- Support the process of a Nuclear Weapons Convention (NWC). While it might be the case that a NWC will not be perfect, and is unlikely to be universal in membership at the outset, I believe that formulating legal documents like this have an immeasurable but nevertheless significant impact on strengthening the norm against a particular weapon. We have seen this in the landmines convention, the cluster-munitions convention, and even the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, all of which remain far from universal, but which have raised the bar in

terms of how we expect states to behave. This will assist not only in disarmament efforts, but also in non-proliferation efforts.

- The Committee will be aware of the letters to the editor of the Wall Street Journal written by George Shultz, Henry Kissinger, William Perry and Sam Nunn (sometimes known as the 'Four Horsemen') in 2007, 2008, and more recently this year by Kissinger. I would like to note that a similar 'Four Horsemen' initiative has been taken by four German statesmen in January of this year, namely Helmut Schmidt, Richard von Weizsacker, Egon Bahr and Hans Dietrich Genscher.³ To some extent, there has been a similar British initiative, with former Defence Secretary, and the current Foreign Secretary making some very public statements about the desirability of a world without nuclear weapons.

I would like to suggest that we in Australia put forward our own (bipartisan) 'Four Horsemen' group, who can produce short and very accessible opinion editorials etc, to a national and international media. Finding four horsemen (or women) who support the elimination of nuclear weapons would not be difficult: suggestions include Gareth Evans, Malcolm Fraser, Alexander Downer, and many others.

Finally, I would add that I am happy to speak to members of the Committee at an appropriate time in order to discuss these issues more fully.

Yours sincerely

Dr Marianne Hanson
Reader in International Relations
Foundation Director, Rotary Centre for International Studies in peace and conflict resolution
Director, Centre for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Studies
School of Political Science and International Studies
The University of Queensland
St Lucia, Brisbane 4072

Tel: 07 3365 3112
Fax: 07 3365 1388
Email: m.hanson@uq.edu.au

¹ SIPRI Yearbook 2008 <http://yearbook2008.sipri.org/05>

² Marianne Hanson, 2002, 'Nuclear Weapons as Obstacles to International Security', *International Relations*, 16(3), September, pp.361-380.

³ 'Toward a Nuclear-Free World: a German View', Helmut Schmidt, Richard von Weizsacker, Egon Bahr and Hans Dietrich Genscher, *International Herald Tribune*, 9 January 2009.