

Prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons, peace and security of Asia - A perspective from Australia

World Conference Against A&H Bombs

5 Aug 22

Dr Tilman Ruff, founding ICAN chair, ICAN Australia board member, IPPNW co-president

I thank Gensuikyo for the opportunity to speak with you on these crucial issues. I speak today from the lands of the Muwinina people in nipaluna, or Hobart, honour them and their continuing custodianship of this unceded land.

I also pay my profound respects to hibakusha, whose courage and humanity continue to inspire and humble me.

Fittingly, the Vienna Declaration which came from the first meeting of TPNW States parties in Vienna drew attention to the failure of nuclear dependent states - like NATO members, Australia and Japan - to take any serious steps to reduce their reliance on nuclear weapons.

Shamefully, through the humanitarian initiative from which the TPNW emerged, Australia has been the most active of the states which came to be called 'weasels'.

Australia was arguably the most active state in seeking to undermine the development of the treaty, and the TPNW negotiations were the first multilateral disarmament negotiations Australia has ever boycotted. Australia's hostility to the TPNW stands in stark contrast to Australia's support and occasional leadership for the treaties which prohibit other types of indiscriminate and inhumane weapons.

Important for us to promote is the fact that joining the TPNW is entirely consistent with a continuing military alliance with a nuclear-armed state, provided nuclear weapons related activities are excluded. 56 former heads of government, defence and foreign ministers or nuclear dependent states and 2 former secretary generals of NATO have stated clearly that there is nothing in their respective defence pacts which precludes joining the TPNW. 11 of the then 17 "major non-NATO allies" of the US voted for treaty adoption and 3 have already ratified the treaty -Thailand, the Philippines and New Zealand, and 2 more have signed - with no disruption to their ongoing non-nuclear military cooperation with the US.

In order to join the treaty, Australia would need to renounce any role for nuclear weapons and the possibility of nuclear weapons being used on behalf of Australia. Ending visits by aircraft or ships carrying nuclear weapons would be straightforward. A

larger negotiated program of work would be required to end Australia's assistance in possible use of US nuclear weapons through from military facilities involved in nuclear command, control and targeting. The facility in Australia currently in starkest violation of the treaty prohibition on assistance with prohibited activities is the Relay Ground Station at Pine Gap, a redundant add-on which could be readily decommissioned or dismantled without affecting ongoing surveillance and intelligence functions.

Since 21 May, Australia has a new government led by the Labor Party. In 2018 we worked hard for the Labor Party National Conference to adopt a policy committing Labor in government to sign and ratify the TPNW, after taking into account a number of considerations which in objective analysis should not be obstacles. This policy was moved by current Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and adopted unanimously. The policy was re-affirmed last year.

A number of tools have been helpful in achieving this policy commitment by the party now holding government, and these and continued advocacy inside and outside the party and in the Parliament will be key to the ongoing work to ensure that this commitment is implemented.

We currently have 100 members of the federal parliament having joined ICAN's Parliamentary Pledge which includes 80% of Labor members, with broad cross factional support and including two thirds of cabinet members.

Repeated opinion polls have shown that despite the previous government's strident opposition to the treaty 70 to 80% of the public want Australia to join this treaty, and only 6% are opposed.

39 local governments, as well as the peak Australian Local Government Association unanimously, support Australia joining the treaty, as do a very broad range of civil society organisations, including most of the trade union movement, an important base of support for Labor.

Divestment work is also bearing fruit and helping to promote the ban and stigmatise nuclear weapons and those who profit from making them. While investments in nuclear weapons manufacturers are large and widespread in our financial sector, we have been able to convince so far 9 financial institutions including one bank and eight pension funds to exclude investing in nuclear weapons producers. From this year, the Responsible Investment Association of Australia, which certifies all financial products in Australia claiming to be ethical or socially responsible, will require all such products to exclude nuclear weapons investments.

We believe that there are real prospects that Australia can be the first nuclear dependent state to join the TPNW. There have been some modest early signs so far of new winds blowing in Canberra, but our work is needed as much as ever. Please help us!

I thank you.