

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
Ligue internationale des femmes pour la paix et la liberté
Liga Internacional de Mujeres por la Paz y la Libertad
Internationale Frauenliga für Frieden und Freiheit

Consultative Status with United Nations ECOSOC, UNCTAD and UNESCO

Special Consultative Relations with FAO, ILO and UNICEF

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24 March 2008

Hon Stephen Smith MP
Minister for Foreign Affairs
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Minister,

Re: US Missile Defence program

Two years ago, we wrote to your predecessor, Mr Downer, concerning the then Howard Government's eager support for US Missile Defence. While we welcomed your own somewhat more prudent response to US Secretary of Defence, Robert Gates' recent overtures on participation in the program by the Rudd Government, we are nevertheless dismayed that once again we now find it necessary to address you as the new Minister on this very same matter.

While we are pleased that you have indicated in your preliminary response to Mr Gates that the Rudd Government will bring an increased level of scrutiny and circumspection to the US delegation's request, we are however dismayed that part of your media release also indicated that you may be seeking to find a form of words to take Australia into the program. Like many Australians, we accepted that the ALP's pre-election statements of "serious concerns" on Missile Defence were made in good faith.

Although we note that your recent public comments have emphasised that any support for the scheme on the part of the Rudd Government would be somewhat "limited" in scope, and that you may be seeking to justify such support on the grounds that it might serve to protect Australian troops in the field, we are not persuaded that any participation in US Missile Defence – "limited" or otherwise - will mitigate the overall effect of Australia's lending important support to a scheme which internationally has become highly suspect.

In taking the lead on the development of Missile Defence systems, the US has indeed opened the door to the pursuit of a new class of weaponry. Although the US Missile Defence program bears the name "defence", it is far from defensive, holding as it does

the potential to lead to a new and destabilising round of arms race. “Defence” in this context is a misnomer; the US Missile Defence program is in fact confrontational and aggressive.

Over recent years, the Bush Administration has evaded negotiations on the limitation of an arms race in outer space and has been forced to use rhetoric to justify its decision to devote huge amounts of their federal budget to Missile “Defence” by talking up putative targets such as in President Bush’s notorious phrase, “the axis of evil”. In short, the development of so-called Missile “Defence” on the part of the US brings the potential for increased levels of destabilisation, especially to relations between the US and its major strategic rivals such as China and Russia.

For many years, Russia and China have sponsored a UNGA resolution calling for a treaty to ban all weapons in space, and the US has consistently voted against it. Every other nation in the world (with the exception of Israel) has supported this resolution for a ban on weapons in space.

Unlike yourself, we are not persuaded that technological developments make the US Missile Defence scheme any less destabilising. In the normal course of events, one would anticipate that technological “improvements” would be made, especially in light of the amount of government funding which has been diverted to corporations for research and development on this scheme.

Indeed we note that the Bush Administration has authorised extremely large amounts of their federal funding for continued research and development on these systems. For instance, by 2015, the US is expected to have spent 800 billion US dollars on Missile “Defence” systems. By 2035, it is estimated that the amount will be 1.2 trillion. These exorbitant sums are to be diverted from the public purse to a few corporations such as Boeing, Raytheon, Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman and Orbital Sciences Corporation. Because we believe that this public money could be better spent on real human and environmental needs, we regard this expenditure as a legalised robbery of the overall population.

Rather than finding a form of words to accept US Missile Defence and Australian participation in it, we believe that the Rudd Government would better serve our national security interests (and incidentally be acting as a better ally to the US) by vigorously pursuing a global ban on Missile Defence through the United Nations.

We therefore call on the Rudd Government not to involve us in any aspect of US Missile Defence but to use your good offices with the United States to urge the cessation of all research and development on this project.

We thank you for your kind attention and look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Cathy Picone and Ruth Russell
National Coordinators

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