

*Statement by the Australian Section of the Women's International League
for Peace and Freedom for the NGO consultation with DFAT
in the lead-up to the NPT PrepCom in Geneva, 28 April to 9 May 2008*

Both internationally and locally, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) has worked for disarmament over many decades since our founding in 1915, and more specifically for nuclear disarmament since the first development of this class of weaponry during World War II.

Although it is now twelve years old, the Canberra Commission's opening statement remains apt:

"The destructiveness of nuclear weapons is immense. Any use would be catastrophic. Nuclear weapons pose an intolerable threat to all humanity and its habitat, yet tens of thousands remain in arsenals built up at an extraordinary time of deep antagonism. That time has passed, yet assertions of their utility continue."

When we say that we regard nuclear weapons as an obscenity, we have in our minds the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the many (often indigenous) peoples whose health has been so severely impacted over decades by uranium mining, milling and nuclear "testing" for the development of these weapons.

In recent years, disarmament diplomacy has become stalled, especially since the failed 2005 NPT Review Conference. (We note in passing that there has been some welcome improvement in freeing up the agenda in the Conference on Disarmament during 2007.) The opportunities of the 2005 RevCon were lost in a destructive blame-game. States parties to the NPT wasted time in accusing one another of obstructionist behaviour: the United States, on the one hand, accused Iran of violating the NPT, while Iran and Egypt pointed the finger in the other direction as the US engaged in the production of a new class of weaponry.

From the bargain at the core of the NPT, the Treaty is manifestly a treaty not only about non-proliferation but also about disarmament. Yet the Nuclear Weapons States have been very willing to use the Treaty for their own ends by talking up the Treaty's purposes of proliferation while lagging on undertakings under Article VI concerning their own obligations "to proceed in good faith towards disarmament". While we see little public questioning about any legitimate basis for the maintenance of nuclear arsenals, we see a great deal of industry and government propaganda about the supposed justifications for continued research and development on these weapons.

A boost is certainly needed to end the logjam around the NPT. In this context, WILPF (Australia) welcomes the new Rudd Government's stated intention to carve out a greater role for Australia in multilateral institutions and to play a greater role in the international community as a "creative middle power". The nuclear disarmament logjam will require all our human powers of creativity!

There have been innumerable warnings about the build-up of nuclear weapons. On leaving office in 1961, then US President Eisenhower warned of the dangers of the "military/industrial/political" complex. It is a matter of profound regret that sixty-three years on, his same warning applies. In its 2006 report, the Weapons of Mass Destruction

Commission chaired by Hans Blix stated that: “So long as any state has nuclear weapons, others will want them. So long as any such weapons remain, there is a risk that will one day be used, by design or by accident. And any such use would be catastrophic.” And in the words of the Canberra Commission, “Nuclear weapons diminish the security of all states”.

WILPF supports the efforts of innumerable NGO’s representing the deep desire of millions of Australians and of billions around the globe for a world free of nuclear weapons. Over decades, polling has consistently revealed this clearly expressed wish. Yet governments in the nuclear-weapons states serving the interests of corporations have continuously evaded these demands of democracy by maintaining that their nuclear arsenals must remain intact for purposes of their “security interests”. We must ask: whose security is being protected?

It goes without saying – and all too often is left unsaid - that, at the heart of the nuclear stand-off lies the tremendous disparity in global economic advantage and disadvantage. The present inequitable distribution of global resources leaves populations in poor nations struggling, suffering ill health and lack of educational and other opportunity while we, the privileged populations in the rich nations of the (mostly) West, are like them, left hostage to the threat of the use of nuclear weapons. Yet this remarkable stupidity is tolerated so that corporate interests may be allowed free reign to continue to operate what we regard as a legitimised robbery on the world’s peoples.

These corporations siphon off increasing proportions of the world’s wealth for a very small few, while many millions, nay billions, continue to live in poverty with all its many afflictions. While these corporations are now located in many countries around the globe, and while in recent years their activities have become increasingly “globalised”, North America, the European Union and Japan remain world leaders while India and China now rival them. These nations have a determination to retain their pre-eminence and privileged status. We believe that it is this determination among those nations that remain the locus of great wealth in a world of increasing disparity and inequity that leads them to defending so steadfastly their present strategic advantage by way of the possession of nuclear arsenals.

If we are to meet our many real and pressing human and environmental needs, we must recognise that nuclear disarmament is inextricably linked to the reductions in military expenditures necessary to achieve a more stable global economic situation. We therefore perceive the pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals as integral to breakthrough on the nuclear disarmament agenda.

In previous correspondence with the Minister, WILPF (Australia) has called for the reconvening of the Canberra Commission so that its unfinished agenda may be fulfilled. Here, we once more reiterate that earnest request.

The Canberra Commission’s call for the following measures as “Immediate Steps” needs to be restated:

- The NWS must commit themselves unequivocally to the elimination of nuclear weapons, and the non-nuclear weapon states to support this commitment by the NWS,

The NWS must:

- Take nuclear forces off alert,
- Remove warheads from delivery vehicles,
- End deployment of non-strategic nuclear weapons,
- End nuclear testing,
- Initiate negotiations to further reduce United States and Russian nuclear arsenals, and
- Agree amongst the nuclear weapon states on reciprocal no first-use undertakings, and of a non-use undertaking by them in relation to the non-nuclear weapon states.

Non-Proliferation

We believe that the goals of disarmament and non-proliferation are two sides of the same coin. As an important contribution to non-proliferation, we would very much wish to see Australia acting as a “creative middle power”.

We believe that Australia should work assiduously for universal acceptance of the NPT. Renewed pressures and inducements should be brought to bear to persuade India, Pakistan and Israel to quickly join the NPT as non-NWS.

While our International Vice-President, Felicity Hill will supply/has supplied more detail on negotiations concerning the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty, let us simply say that Australia should work for the early entry into force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and for cessation of the production of fissile materials for nuclear explosive purposes.

The Link between Nuclear Power and Nuclear Weapons

We have written previously of our organisation’s very strong opposition to nuclear power as an option for civilian electricity supply within Australia. In recent years, the nuclear industry both locally and internationally has been promoting nuclear power as part of their supposed solution to the environmental effects of global warming. Of course, Article IV of the NPT lists the “inalienable right” of states parties to develop nuclear technology on condition that they do not violate their obligation not to manufacture or acquire nuclear weapons. Although we recognise that the NPT provides for the so-called “peaceful” uses of nuclear energy, we nevertheless consider that the link between the civilian nuclear power industry and the proliferation of nuclear weapons is inextricable. For example, nuclear programs in Pakistan, Israel, Iran and North Korea have demonstrated how the production for so-called “peaceful” purposes has allowed the production of nuclear weapons. In addition, the safeguards system operated by the International Atomic Energy Agency is, even according to the IAEA’s own Director, ineffective. Now there is also the risk of terrorist attack on reactors and spent fuel stores. For all these reasons, we support international efforts to halt the production of highly enriched uranium and plutonium, and we would like to see an increased budget for the IAEA to allow it to accomplish its mission.

WILPF (Australia) has previously expressed profound concerns about the effects on the NPT machinery of the undertaking by the United States of America for the transfer of

civilian nuclear technology to India. We believe that the US/India deal has had and will continue to have the effect of undermining the NPT since India is not a signatory to the Treaty. In the wake of this deal, other non-NWS signatories to the NPT may well be justified in asking why they should continue to observe their Treaty obligations when a non-signatory such as India is given privileged access to potential nuclear weapons materials. We believe that this action on the part of the US is not one designed to prevent horizontal proliferation.

Because we oppose the sale of Australian uranium to any non-signatory to the NPT, we welcomed the Rudd Government's undertaking not to proceed with sale of Australian uranium to India. More broadly, we also oppose the sale of Australian uranium to any states parties in possession of nuclear weapons, including Russia and China. We believe that a much higher level of scrutiny needs to be brought to bear on Australian uranium exports generally.

Uranium Mining

Australia has approximately 40% of world uranium reserves and around 20% of world uranium export markets. Over the eleven years of the Howard Government, we have witnessed:

- greatly increased government support for uranium mining in Australia,
- extensive government efforts to build a national high-level nuclear waste repository,
- the building of a new nuclear reactor at Lucas Heights in suburban Sydney, and
- government advocacy for uranium enrichment facilities in Australia.

The Olympic Dam uranium/copper mine in South Australia has produced a radioactive tailings dump of 70 million tons, with an additional 10 million tons expected each year. To date, Australia has produced about 80 tons of plutonium – enough for about 8,000 nuclear weapons.

Uranium mining and milling projects are also expanding in other countries such as India and in numerous countries on the African continent.

As a contribution to non-proliferation and disarmament and because of the inextricable link between civilian and military uses referred to earlier, and because of the deleterious impacts on human health and on the environment, we call for a moratorium on uranium mining.

In conclusion, it is our hope that states parties will find ways to resolve their deadlocks and to reaffirm their commitment to the 2000 Review Conference statement with its 13 steps. Even more, it is our hope that the Australian Government delegation may be able to play a constructive role in bringing potential antagonists together and acting as an honest broker. And finally, we note that this year's Australian Government delegation to the UN Commission on the Status of Women includes three NGO representatives, and so we take this opportunity once more to respectfully request that an NGO representative be included in the Australian Government delegation to this year's NPT PrepCom.

*Prepared for WILPF (Australia)
by Ruth Corrigan, Ruth Russell and Cathy Picone, April 2008*