



3 December 2014

The Hon Julie Bishop MP
Minister for Foreign Affairs
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Open letter to the Foreign Minister of Australia concerning the Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, 8–9 December 2014

Dear Minister,

We, the undersigned civil society organisations, urge you and your department to engage vigorously and positively with the growing humanitarian focus on nuclear weapons, in particular at the forthcoming conference in Vienna on 8–9 December 2014. Both preceding conferences – in Norway in March 2013 and Mexico in February 2014 – have given renewed focus and energy to global efforts to eliminate nuclear weapons.

The third international conference on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons in Vienna promises to add further knowledge and understanding, as well as impetus, to the cause of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. As the Austrian foreign ministry has indicated, the conference will “contribute to the growing momentum to firmly anchor the humanitarian imperative in all global efforts dealing with nuclear weapons and nuclear disarmament”.

The continued existence of over 16,000 nuclear weapons in the arsenals of just nine countries remains the gravest immediate threat to global health and survival. All such countries continue to invest heavily in modernising and upgrading their nuclear arsenals, and none have plans to eliminate them in the foreseeable future. So long as these weapons exist, there is a real danger they will be used, whether by design or accident.

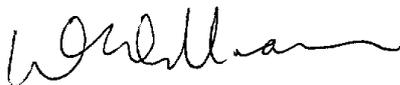
It would take just a single nuclear weapon to destroy an entire city, and the use of several dozen on cities could disrupt the global climate, leading to widespread agricultural collapse and famine. The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, United Nations agencies and an overwhelming majority of governments have acknowledged that there could be no effective humanitarian response to such an event.

The catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons were acknowledged by consensus at the 2010 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, and confirmed in scientific detail at the conferences in Norway and Mexico. They make a treaty-based ban on nuclear weapons crucial. Eliminating nuclear weapons is the only responsible, humane course of action. We therefore urge the Australian government:

- To support and participate actively in the Vienna conference, and to make detailed and positive contributions, including in relation to the devastating effects of the British nuclear test program in Australia in the 1950s and 1960s. We urge the inclusion of nuclear test survivors and appropriate scientific experts in the Australian delegation to the conference.
- To commission research on the effects of a nuclear war on climate and food production and security in Australia and our region. Australian expertise in climate and agricultural science can contribute substantially to the evidence base key to informing policy choices about nuclear weapons and their elimination.
- To endorse the call made at the conference in Mexico earlier this year for a diplomatic process to negotiate a legally binding instrument prohibiting nuclear weapons as a necessary first step towards their complete elimination.
- To take immediate steps to establish an Australian defence posture that is no longer predicated on the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons.

Every year more than US\$105 billion is spent on nuclear weapons programs – a gross diversion of resources away from schools, hospitals and other vital services. An investment of diplomatic resources and political capital in nuclear abolition is an investment in global public health, environmental sustainability, the rule of law, human security and development. It is an essential and urgent investment in our collective future.

Yours sincerely,



(Dr) Bill Williams
 President
 International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (Australia)

On behalf of the following organisations:

- Act for Peace – National Council of Churches in Australia
- Anti-Nuclear Alliance of Western Australia
- Australian Conservation Foundation
- Australian Education Union Victoria
- Australian Nuclear Free Alliance
- Australian Student Environment Network
- Beyond Nuclear Initiative
- Campaign for International Cooperation and Disarmament
- Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Sydney
- Conservation Council of Western Australia
- Environment Centre Northern Territory
- Footprints for Peace
- Friends of the Earth Australia
- Greenpeace Australia Pacific
- Gundjeihmi Aboriginal Corporation

- Just Peace Queensland
- Medical Association for Prevention of War
- National Tertiary Education Union
- Pax Christi Victoria
- Peace and Social Justice Network of Victorian Quakers
- People for Nuclear Disarmament
- Public Health Association of Australia
- Queensland Nuclear Free Alliance
- Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Australia
- Safe Ground
- Social Policy Connections
- Soka Gakkai International (Australia)
- The Wilderness Society
- United Nations Association of Australia
- Uniting Church in Australia Assembly
- Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (Australia)