



Goodwill Ambassador's Statement on the UN Nuclear Weapons Prohibition Treaty

The United Nations Association of Australia (UNAA) congratulates the 122 participating States Parties of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) for the historic vote on 7 July 2017 to adopt the Nuclear Weapons Prohibition Treaty (NWPT). While the NWPT will not in and by itself lead to the elimination of nuclear weapons by non-signatories, it provides proof that most countries abhor such weapons, and encourages nuclear weapon states to move in that direction.

Nuclear weapons are the single greatest human threat to our planet. The collective efforts of participating States, UN agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons led to the success of the negotiations. Among the States Parties were 26 countries from the Asia-Pacific, including almost all Southeast Asian and Pacific Island nations. Australia did not participate in the negotiations despite being a long-standing non-nuclear weapon country, and an influential past advocate for nuclear non-proliferation and arms reductions. While understanding the Australian Government's inability to sign the treaty in the currently adverse international security environment, the UNAA is disappointed at the decision not to participate in these historic negotiations.

The NWPT expresses in simple but powerful language the international community's abhorrence of nuclear weapons and affirms the nuclear weapon prohibition norm both as a moral imperative for all states and as a legally binding obligation for all signatories. The Treaty is a milestone in part because it ensures that all weapons of mass destruction are banned, complementing existing conventions prohibiting chemical and biological weapons. The NWPT is by no means a perfect treaty - such documents seldom are. But the Treaty restates the vision for a nuclear weapon free world as expressed in Article VI of the NPT.

The UNAA believes that Australia should consistently advocate for this vision, a requirement made pressing by the increasing number of countries that have acquired or are acquiring nuclear weapons at huge opportunity cost to their citizens. The continuing and intensifying challenge of North Korea's nuclear and missile programs provide a salutary reminder of the unacceptable existential threat that nuclear weapons present to humanity -- particularly in the Asia-Pacific, the only location in which such weapons have ever been used. In addition, sites in Australia and the Pacific have also been the scene of nuclear testing.

The world is currently divided between nuclear weapon states who remain committed to the NPT as the sole regulatory instrument of the global nuclear order, and almost two-thirds of non-nuclear weapon states for whom the NWPT's prohibition norm supersedes the NPT. The UNAA believes that every proliferation threat diminishes the chances of further nuclear arms reductions, but also that continuing delay in practical disarmament measures increases the risk of additional proliferation. Accordingly, there is a need to ensure that the two global treaties support and reinforce each other. Their parallel existence provides opportunities for responsible leadership by countries that do not possess nuclear weapons, and shelter under the nuclear umbrella of their allies, to seek common ground in pursuit of the shared goals of nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament among the largely overlapping groups of States Parties of the two treaties.

The NWPT provides another example of the critical importance of the rules-based international order, and the central role played by the United Nations. The UNAA encourages the Australian Government to actively stay abreast of NWPT developments and in due course, when national and international security circumstances have improved, to consider becoming a party to the Treaty.

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