

For a Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific

In 2019, Pope Francis at Hiroshima clearly stated: 'The use of atomic energy for purposes of war is immoral, just as the possessing of nuclear weapons is immoral.' For Australia, the call is for good relations with our neighbours in the Asia Pacific region and all other nations. It involves co-operation on shared global challenges that make the world safe with good relations with our neighbours and all nations instead of fear-based reactions that lead to the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Military operations have continually contaminated indigenous lands across the Pacific as well as the ocean itself, endangering lives and ecosystems with radioactive waste, nerve agents, and chemical weapons like Agent Orange.

Our political leaders always tie security to warfare where national security always leads to talk of warships, submarines, jet fighters, tanks, and bombs. They fail to appreciate that national security lay in relationship that include foreign aid without strings attached, increased welfare, and decent and affordable housing, better education, building climate-resilient communities in Australia and in the Pacific, supporting Indigenous communities, and transport infrastructure. These will contribute to security of Australian and overseas communities. It is about prioritising people and their needs.

In recent years, we have fixated on the supposed threats posed by China as we ignore US actions against other countries. Former Labor PM Paul Keating commenting on the AUKUS deal said, 'The notion that Australia is in a state of military apprehension about China, or needs to be, is a distortion and lie of the worst and most grievous proportions. By its propagation, Australia is determinedly casting China as an enemy – and in the doing of it, actually creating an enemy where none exists....' (<https://www.smh.com.au/world/asia/morrison-is-making-an-enemy-of-china-and-labor-is-helping-him-20210921-p58tek.html>). We have spent billions on AUKUS and expanding our military infrastructure. Australia's commitment to AUKUS could cost anywhere from \$268 billion to \$368 billion over the next 30 years. It is great surrender of sovereignty. The call is to greater co-operation and celebration of the achievements of our neighbours rather than being confronted by them.

In the mid-1970s by Pacific Islanders, activists, and environmentalists opposed to nuclear colonialism, testing, and waste dumping in the Pacific established the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific (NFIP) movement to advocate for a nuclear free and independent Pacific that linked to environmental security to self-determination and opposed foreign militarisation and forced displacement. It was a response in the 1960s-70s to U.S., British, and French atmospheric nuclear tests in the Marshall Islands, Australia, and French Polynesia. Led by Indigenous activists, it centred on the rights of Pacific people who were often treated as "guinea pigs" by foreign nuclear powers.

The Pacific Islands have long been at the forefront of global nuclear disarmament efforts. They have suffered from by hundreds of nuclear and radioactive material tests by powerful nuclear weapons states between 1946 to 1996 continue to endure the intergenerational human and environmental effects of those nuclear tests. Australia, a supposedly good Pacific neighbour, must join in these Pacific states to keep the region free from nuclear weapons. As in the case of the Marshall Islands, the worsening climate crisis has made the question of nuclear risks and safety more urgent with the geopolitical competition and increasing military of the major powers.

Religious and peace groups including MAPW (Medical Association for the Prevention of War) and ICAN (International Campaign Against Nuclear Weapons) called for Australia to sign and ratify the 2017 UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. In 2020, an interfaith letter endorsed by 61 faith organisations exhorted the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition for Australia to join the Treaty. Grave concern was expressed at the persistent global threat posed by nuclear weapons with a call to pursue peace and love and care for humanity and creation. In accord with Pope Francis, they expressed the belief that nuclear weapons are illegitimate, inhumane and indiscriminate.

Pax Christi Australia calls on the Government to join half the world's nations in signing the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. This Treaty champions collective security beyond nuclear weapons and sets a new stand for nations seeking nuclear abolition, to ensure these weapons are never used again. This is the *only* global instrument that is leading us towards a nuclear weapons free world. Australia's signature would be by far the strongest indication we could give other nations of our commitment to this goal.

In 2022, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said, "Today, humanity is just one misunderstanding, one miscalculation away from nuclear annihilation." In recent years, geopolitical tensions, conflicts and erratic leadership have escalated, increasing nuclear danger. Proliferating nuclear weapons in response to insecurity will just increase the likelihood of their being used. The only rational approach to the risks posed by these weapons is disarmament. Let us not dismiss diplomacy and other statecraft in favour of Australian nuclear weapons and the global arms race they would aggravate is a recipe for nuclear proliferation.

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