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M E D I A R E L E A S E

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Australian Government's response to the International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament (ICNND) Report

Australia has a strong and longstanding record of activism and achievement on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament and other arms control issues.

This record has been a prominent theme of Australia's multilateral engagement, and of our commitment to making the substantial contribution to peace and security expected of a good international citizen.

Australia has taken a leading role in the negotiation of major international arms control instruments, including the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, the Chemical Weapons Convention, the IAEA's Additional Protocol and, most recently, the Cluster Munitions Convention.

We have made a substantial contribution, including through capacity-building programs, to strengthening nuclear safeguards, safety and security regimes, especially in the Asia-Pacific region.

Australia's prominent role in export control regimes, including notably through the Australia Group, has helped in a practical way to counter proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. We are a founding participant in the Proliferation Security Initiative.

Australia strongly supports international efforts, including the imposition of UN and autonomous sanctions, to contain the proliferation threats posed by North Korea and Iran.

Australia has also invested in the development of policy approaches and promotion of public debate on non-proliferation and disarmament issues.

The 1996 report of the Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons is still a major reference document – highly regarded for its cogent thinking and well-argued recommendations on how to reach the goal of a world without nuclear weapons.

The establishment by the Government in September 2008 of the International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament (ICNND) was another milestone in Australia's distinguished record. It demonstrated the Government's commitment to make nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament a high priority.

As a joint initiative with Japan, the establishment of the Commission also reflected our two countries' shared objectives and interests in international nuclear policy issues.

Although the Commission was established and supported by the Australian and Japanese Governments, it was independent – staunchly so. The Co-chairs and other Commissioners were appointed in their personal capacities, in recognition of their high calibre credentials.

ICNND's value and credibility has been founded on that independence.

The Commission launched its report, *Eliminating Nuclear Threats*, in Tokyo on 15 December 2009, in the presence of Prime Minister Rudd and Prime Minister Hatoyama.

The report fulfilled the Australian Government's confident expectation that the Commission would make a substantial contribution towards achieving the goal of a world without nuclear weapons and, in the shorter term, to achieving a positive outcome at the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference to be held in New York this month, convening today.

As Prime Minister Rudd said at the launch in Tokyo, the report represents an important framework for discussion and debate on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament.

I again congratulate the ICNND Co-chairs, Professor Gareth Evans and Ms Yoriko Kawaguchi, and the thirteen other Commissioners, on the outcome of their deliberations.

The report has been widely acclaimed by governments, international organisations, policy institutes, academic institutions and civil society. It has been welcomed as a comprehensive, practical, timely and influential contribution to advancing action on the challenging non-proliferation and disarmament agenda.

The report reminds us of the threats and risks of existing nuclear weapons and of their further proliferation to new states or to terrorists, and the need to manage carefully the expansion of civil nuclear energy.

The report proposes a comprehensive action agenda, based on 76 recommendations of policies and actions to be taken in the short, medium and longer term to achieve the eventual goal of 'getting to zero'.

The Commission was not set up, nor was its report written, to reflect Australian Government policy. However, most of its analysis, action agenda and recommendations are in step with the Government's nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament priorities and policies.

Non-proliferation recommendations

On the overall non-proliferation strategy and actions to be taken, there is much common ground between the report and the Government's position.

Like the report, the Government accords priority to strengthening the safeguards and verification regime, in particular through the adoption of the Additional Protocol, which is a condition of supply for Australian uranium.

We are working to strengthen compliance with and enforcement of the NPT, including through ensuring the role of the United Nations Security Council is fulfilled in accordance with the UN Charter in the event of a state's withdrawal from the NPT.

The Government also wants the IAEA to be able to exercise its mandate fully and effectively. We pursue this through Australia's membership of the IAEA Board of Governors, strong engagement with all aspects of the IAEA's work, and working with other members of the Board of Governors to ensure the Agency is adequately resourced.

Disarmament recommendations

Much of the report's disarmament agenda is also consistent with Government policy. We share the goal of a world without nuclear weapons.

In moving towards that goal, the Government is mindful that Australian defence policy acknowledges the value to Australia of the protection afforded by extended nuclear deterrence under the US Alliance. Under this, as long as nuclear weapons exist, we can rely on US nuclear forces to deter nuclear attack on Australia.

The Government gives priority, as does the ICNND report, to the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty and, in the interim, maintenance of the moratorium on nuclear weapons testing.

Australia is pushing for the negotiation of an effectively verifiable Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT) and, pending that, a moratorium on the production of fissile material for weapons purposes, as well as the declaration of fissile material that is no longer required for military purposes, and its placement under IAEA safeguards or other such verification.

The Government also wants to see deep and irreversible reductions in the numbers of nuclear weapons held by all the nuclear-armed states.

The ICNND report makes a case for specific reductions in numbers to be achieved by certain times, including the 'minimisation point' of a global maximum of 2000 nuclear weapons by 2025.

The merits of that case – whether it is aiming for too much or too little – can be debated. While the debate about numbers can be of value in focusing attention on disarmament, the Government considers it more important to concentrate on the actions that need to be taken to create the strategic and political conditions that will encourage deep and irreversible reductions.

In that context, we have warmly welcomed the signature by President Obama and President Medvedev of the new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty on 8 April, including as a positive demonstration of what can be achieved when there is political will, and a spirit of cooperation. We also welcome the commitment to pursuing negotiations on further reductions of strategic and tactical weapons, including non-deployed weapons.

The Government urges a reduced role for nuclear weapons in national security strategies.

The ICNND report recommends that every nuclear-armed state make an unequivocal 'no first use' declaration or, if not prepared to do that, declare that the sole purpose of its nuclear weapons is to deter others from using nuclear weapons against that state or its allies.

As the Government said recently in welcoming the US Nuclear Posture Review (NPR), the United States knows that Australia would be comfortable if the United States were to reach its stated objective of making deterrence of nuclear attack the sole purpose of its nuclear weapons, although the NPR notes that significant work is required to establish the conditions to do so safely. The Government would also welcome sole purpose declarations by other nuclear-armed states as a confidence building measure.

The Government agrees with the ICNND report that negative security assurances from nuclear-weapon to non-nuclear-weapon states should be strengthened, with fewer caveats than the current negative security assurances. We are pleased that the recent US NPR provided an unambiguous

assurance that the United States will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states that are party to the NPT and in compliance with their nuclear non-proliferation obligations.

Nuclear Energy recommendations

In regard to the ICNND report's support for nuclear energy and recommendations for its management, the Government's starting point is that it does not support nuclear power as an energy option for Australia.

The Government recognises, however, that some other countries will choose nuclear power to help meet their energy needs. As a major supplier of uranium, Australia has a responsibility to help ensure that the expansion of nuclear energy occurs within an effective non-proliferation framework. We will continue our work, in multilateral and regional forums and bilaterally, to strengthen nuclear safeguards, safety and security regimes.

We consider that the report makes useful recommendations to address the proliferation risks that could be associated with the expansion of the civil nuclear industry.

Non-NPT parties

The ICNND report also considers the status of those nuclear-armed states that are not members of the NPT.

The Government continues to support the goal of NPT universalisation. We agree with the report, however, that every effort should be made to bring the non-NPT states within existing and future non-proliferation and disarmament mechanisms.

On the issue of their access to nuclear materials and technology, the Government's longstanding policy is to supply Australian uranium and other nuclear materials and technology to NPT parties only.

NPT Review Conference

I will attend the opening sessions of the NPT Review Conference to deliver Australia's national statement today, Monday 3 May.

Australia's strong non-proliferation and disarmament credentials, and the positive momentum generated by the Commission and its report, will help Australia play a constructive role in the Review Conference.

Together with Japan, Australia has submitted a joint Package of Practical Nuclear Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Measures as a working paper for the Conference.

We and Japan have also facilitated the submission to the Conference, as a proposal from the Commission, of the ICNND report's twenty point statement on 'A New International Consensus on Action for Nuclear Disarmament'.

We believe that the Joint Package, and the ICNND statement, will make a valuable contribution to the Conference deliberations.

Conclusion

Today I will also attend the ICNND side event at the NPT Review Conference. The event will be attended by Japanese State Secretary for Foreign Affairs Mr Tetsuro Fukuyama and the ICNND Co-chairs Professor Gareth Evans and Ms Yoriko Kawaguchi.

The Commission will convene its final meeting in early July in Vienna. It will meet in the knowledge that it has made a very substantial contribution to advancing both debate and action on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament objectives. I again thank the Co-chairs and their fellow Commissioners for the valuable work they have done.

The Australian Government will, within our policy settings, continue to play a constructive and active role in advocating and implementing the report's comprehensive action agenda.