



Uniting**Justice**
AUSTRALIA

Nuclear Weapons and Non-proliferation a view from the Uniting Church in Australia

***“ownership, use, or threatened use of nuclear,
chemical and/or biological weapons is evil”***

(Uniting for Peace, July 2003)

Peace, Nuclear Weapons and the Uniting Church

The Uniting Church in Australia is committed to being a peacemaking church and to working for peace and justice in the world. In 2003 the National Assembly adopted a statement entitled, *Uniting for Peace*¹. It stated the Church’s belief that

reliance on weapons for peace and security can never achieve a just and lasting peace. Security achieved through armament is sustained by fear of the enemy and can never see the world reconciled;

and that

genuine global security will only be achieved by working for an end to the trade in illegal weapons and the arms trade, preventing the proliferation of nuclear or other weapons of mass destruction, and requiring progressive disarmament of all nations.

This most recent resolution affirms past commitments to work for ‘general and complete disarmament’², the abolition of all nuclear weapons³, support an end to the production of weapons-grade fissionable materials⁴, and previous calls on the Australian Government to support a comprehensive ban on nuclear testing⁵ and end our involvement in the nuclear fuel cycle.⁶

All Christian affirmation about peace arises from the belief that Jesus Christ is our peace and that the call to Christian discipleship includes working to end violence and fear. Christians believe that the gospel message is one of hope and transformation. The

¹ available at <http://nat.uca.org.au/unitingjustice/resourcearchive/assemblyresolutions/index.html#pea>

² *Militarism and Disarmament*, Third Assembly, Uniting Church in Australia, May 1982, available

<http://nat.uca.org.au/unitingjustice/resourcearchive/assemblyresolutions/index.html#pea>

³ *Statement on Nuclear Deterrence, Disarmament and Peace*, Assembly Standing Committee, Uniting Church in Australia, September 1988, available <http://nat.uca.org.au/unitingjustice/resourcearchive/assemblyresolutions/index.html#pea>

⁴ *Militarism and Disarmament*, *ibid.*

⁵ *Militarism and Disarmament*, *ibid.*

⁶ *Nuclear Fuel Cycle Policy*, Assembly Standing Committee, March 2000,

<http://nat.uca.org.au/unitingjustice/resourcearchive/assemblyresolutions/index.html#energy>

Church is invited by God to participate in this mission of transformation which looks forward to the reconciliation of all creation with God. The Biblical vision of peace leads us to understand the sacredness of all life and that the God's will for humankind is for justice and wholeness for all people. The Church's opposition to nuclear weapons lies in the grave threat they pose to people and the planet. We believe there is no greater threat to the peace of God in this world than that posed by weapons of mass destruction. Designed as they are to annihilate their existence is entirely contrary to God's creative will for the world.

The Uniting Church also affirms the position of the World Council of Churches, most recently articulated in the Minute on the Elimination of Nuclear Arms⁷ which calls each member church, of which the Uniting Church in Australia is one, to

urge its own government to pursue the unequivocal elimination of nuclear weapons under the terms of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Governments that have decided to abstain from developing nuclear weapons should be affirmed; states that are not signatories of NPT must be pressed to sign the treaty as non-nuclear states.

This minute also invites member churches

to work to overcome the ignorance and complacency in society concerning the nuclear threat, especially to raise awareness in generations with no memory of what these weapons do

and

Strongly recommends that, until the goal of nuclear disarmament is achieved, member churches prevail upon their governments to take collective responsibility for making international nuclear disarmament machinery work including mechanisms to verify compliance, for securing nuclear weapons and weapons-useable material from non-state actors, and for supporting the International Atomic Energy Agency in its critical mission of monitoring fissile material and peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

The NPT and the Need for a Nuclear Weapons Convention

While understanding that the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty is far from a perfect instrument, the Uniting Church is committed to seeing Australia continue to support the treaty, and maintain its integrity by supporting measures to promote non-proliferation and disarmament. The NPT is the only international treaty in which nuclear powers are explicitly committed to nuclear disarmament, a crucial step in halting proliferation. Parties to the treaty must build on it.

We believe that a Nuclear Weapons Convention would strengthen the NPT, not undermine it. It would outline a systematic program for achieving the goal of Article VI of the NPT, for Nuclear Weapons States (NWS) to disarm their nuclear weapons.

⁷ adopted by the Ninth Assembly, Porto Alegre, Brazil, 2006, available at <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/porto-alegre-2006/1-statements-documents-adopted/international-affairs/report-from-the-public-issues-committee/nuclear-arms.html>

Prior to the 2005 NPT Review Conference the Uniting Church President at that time, Rev. Dr Dean Drayton wrote to the then Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, and spoke publicly about our hopes for strong and positive outcomes. We were particularly concerned that countries like Australia would be pressured to soften their stance on nuclear weapons and hoped that Australia's traditionally-strong stand against proliferation and the development of nuclear weapons remained so. In addition, we urged the then Minister to express an unwavering commitment to Article VI calling for complete disarmament, to urge for the implementation of the 13 point action plan of the 2000 Review Conference (including the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty) and to call for all states possessing nuclear weapons to lower the operational status of their weapons systems. It will not be surprising then, that we were disappointed with the progress and outcomes of the Review Conference, particularly the degree to which the integrity of the Treaty was undermined, and that the concerns we expressed three years ago are ones we still hold.

The 2008 Preparatory Committee Conference

The Uniting Church welcomes the many positive aspects of the Labor Party's 2007 National Platform and Constitution in regard to nuclear weapons. In particular, the Church supports the Labor Party's strong commitment to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation and to the implementation of the recommendations of the Canberra Commission.

The Labor Party's support for the negotiation of a Nuclear Weapons Convention is also particularly pleasing. The Uniting Church looks forward to the implementation of the policies outlined in the National Platform by the Rudd Federal Government, particularly its commitment to pursue substantial reductions in the nuclear arsenals of nuclear weapons states, in the ultimate aim of a nuclear weapon free world.

The Uniting Church, therefore, calls on the Government to take a strong stand on nuclear disarmament at the 2008 Conference, doing all it can to advocate for the complete elimination of all nuclear weapons.

The Uniting Church calls on the Government to

- renew its strong commitment to the NPT;
- take positive action towards the establishment of a Nuclear Weapons Convention;
- take positive action to ensure that steps are taken towards an agreement to lower the operational status of nuclear weapons in all nuclear weapons states; and
- apply continued pressure on all nuclear weapons states to fulfil their commitments under the NPT to disarm.

The Uniting Church hopes that the 2008 Preparatory Committee Conference will generate many productive and positive outcomes.

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