

Media Backgrounder: Nuclear testing and Australia

The Trump administration on Friday [reportedly](#) discussed the **resumption of nuclear testing after a 28-year moratorium**, purportedly with the aim of pressuring Russia and China into a new arms agreement. This follows a series of US moves that have undermined or collapsed nuclear arms control agreements including the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (Iran deal) and the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty.

Australia claims to rely on US nuclear weapons for our security in our defence white paper, thereby legitimizing the US' nuclear program. This conflicts with Australia's stated commitment to nuclear disarmament. As a signatory to the *Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty* and the *South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty*, Australia has undertaken not to possess nuclear weapons and to pursue nuclear disarmament.

Nuclear testing in more than 60 locations worldwide has left a deadly legacy for people and the environment, including in Australia and the Pacific. The British nuclear tests at Maralinga are the subject of a new documentary [Maralinga Tjarutja](#), recently broadcast on ABC and a drama series [Operation Buffalo](#), beginning Sunday 31 May 2020. From 1952-1963, 12 major nuclear tests and hundreds of "minor trials" were conducted in WA and SA. Aboriginal people were displaced from their land, sections of which remain permanently contaminated.

The **2017 UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons** (TPNW) comprehensively outlaws nuclear weapons and sets out a pathway for their elimination. It was negotiated and finalised with the support of 122 nations, and currently has 81 signatories and 37 states parties. It will enter into force after the 50th ratification, expected within the next 18 months.

Besides the prohibitions on activities relating to nuclear weapons, the treaty contains **positive obligations to care for victims of nuclear weapons activities and to take measures towards environmental remediation**. Harvard Law School has produced two short papers on the positive obligations provisions of the TPNW:

- [Victim assistance](#)
- [Environmental remediation](#)

ICAN Australia Ambassadors Aunty Sue Coleman-Haseldine (Kokatha elder and nuclear test survivor) and Karina Lester (Yankunytjatjara-Anangu second-generation nuclear test survivor) spoke at the 2017 TPNW negotiating conference on the ongoing impact of nuclear testing on Indigenous peoples. Their presentations contributed significantly to the inclusion of positive obligations in the final treaty, as well as its recognition of the 'disproportionate impact of nuclear-weapon activities on indigenous peoples' in the preamble.

Australia has not yet signed or ratified the TPNW, claiming that it is incompatible with our alliance with the US. In fact, the TPNW permits military cooperation with nuclear-armed states, so long as it does not involve cooperation with the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. Legal analysis demonstrates that Australia "Joining the TPNW would further Australia's longstanding commitment to nuclear disarmament, while preserving Australia's military alliance with the United States" ([Harvard Law School](#)).

While the Australian government has resisted signing on to the TPNW thus far, the federal Opposition has committed to sign and ratify in government. 79% of the Australian public support this move (Ipsos, Nov 2018).

The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons was awarded the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize for our role in achieving the TPNW. ICAN was founded in Australia in 2007.

To arrange interviews with nuclear test veteran Avon Hudson or ICAN representatives contact Gem Romuld, 0421 955 066 / gem@icanw.org.

FYI published today: ICAN's Dr Sue Wareham in the Canberra Times
<https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6767846/as-we-wait-for-a-vaccine-there-is-another-global-threat-we-could-address-today/>