

Open Letter in Support of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

19 June 2022

Dear Prime Minister,

As former Australian Ambassadors and High Commissioners, we believe in the norm-setting power of international law and the value of multilateralism. We also believe that Australia can – and must – be a leader in efforts to tackle major global problems.

As such, we warmly welcome your pre-election commitment to sign and ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), which we regard as essential for bringing the current nuclear arms race to an end and for establishing the kind of truly representative multilateral framework that might be expected to usher in and support a new era of genuine disarmament.

Under your leadership, we hope to see the goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world reinstated as an Australian foreign policy priority. We hope, too, that Labor's commitment to the TPNW will be swiftly realised. Making meaningful gains in eliminating the most destructive weapons ever invented is as crucial for Australia's security as it is for the security of people everywhere.

We consider it unacceptable that almost 13,000 nuclear weapons remain in the world today, more than half a century after the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) entered into force. These weapons pose an existential threat to human life. That threat is again underlined now by Russia's nuclear sabre-rattling over Ukraine and, more generally, by the abysmal state of relations between the United States and its two most powerful nuclear-armed rivals. Unless we chart a new course, nuclear weapons will almost certainly be used again, with predictably catastrophic consequences.

By becoming a state party to the TPNW, Australia can work with like-minded states to help avert such a calamity – and at the same time restore its reputation as a champion of multilateral disarmament. This is a sensible and overdue step. We urge you to take it without delay.

The TPNW enjoys the widespread support of Australians and the international community. One hundred and twenty-two nations voted to adopt it in New York in 2017. The treaty currently has 86 signatories and 62 states parties. Many of those states parties are Australia's neighbours in Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

The TPNW reaffirms the need for full and effective implementation of the NPT and, like that treaty, is underpinned by safeguards arrangements administered by the International Atomic Energy Agency. It completes a triad of comprehensive bans on weapons of mass destruction: nuclear weapons are no longer an exception.

Membership of the TPNW is compatible with Australia's alliance commitments and will make a positive contribution to the security objectives we share. We have previously signed and ratified treaties – on landmines, cluster munitions and nuclear testing – to which the United States is not a party.

In the course of our careers, we have seen firsthand what our country can achieve on the world stage and know that Australia is at its best when it pursues a principled foreign policy – one that advances the global common good. The TPNW is fundamentally in line with such an approach. Joining it would be a most commendable step.

Yours Sincerely,

Ms Joanna Adamson

Former High Commissioner to Ghana

Ms Margaret Adamson

Former Ambassador to Cambodia, Poland and the Czech Republic and High Commissioner to Pakistan

Dr Ruth Adler

Former Ambassador to Ireland and High Commissioner to Brunei

Dr John R Baker

Former High Commissioner to Tanzania

Honorary Prof Howard Bamsey

Former Ambassador for the Environment and Ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva

Mr Lex Bartlem OAM

Former Ambassador to Lebanon

Dr Peter Bassett

Former High Commissioner to Kiribati

Mr Jeffrey Benson

Former Ambassador to Denmark and Iceland

Mr Geoff Bentley

Former Ambassador to Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan

Mr Brendan Berne

Former Ambassador to France and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation

Mr Ken Berry

Former Ambassador to Chile, Peru and Bolivia

Hon Dr Neal Blewett AC

Former High Commissioner to the United Kingdom

Mr Trevor Boucher

Former Ambassador to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

Mr John Bowan

Former Ambassador to Germany

Dr Sue Boyd AM

Former Ambassador to Vietnam and High Commissioner to Bangladesh, Fiji, Tuvalu and Nauru

Mr Richard Broinowski AO

Former Ambassador to Mexico, South Korea and Vietnam

Mr Richard Butler AC

Former Ambassador for Disarmament and Ambassador to the United Nations and Thailand

Mr Tim Cole

Former Ambassador to the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands and Palau

Mr Malcolm Dan

Former Ambassador to Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, Chile and Bolivia

Mr John Dauth AO LVO OBE

Former Ambassador to the United Nations and High Commissioner to Malaysia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom

Mr Ted Delofski

Former High Commissioner to Singapore, Ambassador to the World Trade Organisation and Ambassador to the Netherlands

Dr Dominique De Stoop

Former Ambassador to Venezuela, Colombia, Peru and Ecuador

Mr John Fennessy

Former Ambassador to Lebanon

Mr Denis Fitzgerald

Former High Commissioner to Nauru

Dr Stephen FitzGerald AO

Former Ambassador to China

Dr Janet Gardiner

Former Ambassador to Syria and Portugal

Mr Max Gaylard

Former High Commissioner to the Solomon Islands

Ms Anna George

Former Ambassador to Croatia

Mr Robert Hamilton

Former Ambassador to Mexico, Cuba and Central America

Mr Peter Hooton

Former High Commissioner to Samoa and the Solomon Islands

Mr James Ingram AO

Former Ambassador to the Philippines and High Commissioner to Canada, Jamaica, Barbados, Guyana and the Bahamas

Ms Di Johnstone AM

Former Ambassador to Nepal

Mr Philip Kentwell

Former High Commissioner to Trinidad and Tobago and other member states of the Caribbean Community

Mr Christopher Lamb PSM

Former Ambassador to Myanmar, Yugoslavia, Romania and North Macedonia

Mr Ian Lincoln

Former Ambassador to Vietnam

Mr John McCarthy AO

Former Ambassador to the United States, Indonesia, Japan, Vietnam, Mexico and Thailand and High Commissioner to India

Ms Lyndall McLean AM

Former Ambassador to Myanmar

Mr John Menadue AO

Former Ambassador to Japan and Secretary of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet

Mr Geoff Miller AO

Former Ambassador to Japan and South Korea and High Commissioner to New Zealand

Mr Robert Newton

Former Ambassador to Egypt, Libya, Syria, Sudan and Tunisia

Ms Anne Quinane

Former High Commissioner to Kiribati and Malta

Mr David Reese

Former Ambassador for Disarmament

Prof Richard Rigby

Former Ambassador to Israel

Mr Peter Rodgers

Former Ambassador to Israel

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Former High Commissioner to the Solomon Islands

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Mr Evan Williams

Former High Commissioner to Cyprus

Mr Mack Williams

Former High Commissioner to Bangladesh and Ambassador to the Philippines and South Korea

Mr Trevor Wilson

Former Ambassador to Myanmar

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Former Ambassador to Peru and Bolivia and to Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Haiti and the Dominican Republic