

Conference on Disarmament

Positions for the Commonwealth of Australia

I. Developing a Draft Convention on the Regulation of Small-Scale Nuclear Weapons and Radiological Devices

On September 26th, 2010, Mr. Kevin Rudd, the Foreign Minister of the Commonwealth of Australia, questioned the United Nations' ability to contribute to the disarmament of nuclear weapons. Mr. Rudd said that, "if [the UN] has a conference on disarmament, it should do disarmament -- not pretend," and that "the international community can no longer tolerate the actions of a few dissenting states to roadblock the common resolve of the many." His words effectively express the position of the Australian government in its involvement with the Conference on Disarmament. Australia has had an extensive history in these matters. Internally, the Australian government has passed legislation intended to counter nuclear proliferation; examples include the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Act of 1987, which tracks and controls the movement of nuclear material within Australia, and the Weapons of Mass Destruction Act of 1995, which supplements the Customs Act of 1901 and specifically concerns the regulation of items used to create WMDs and other nuclear devices. Australia has also been an active member of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty since 1973, as well as an original signer of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) of 1996. The Commonwealth of Australia is fully committed to the eventual disarmament of all strategic nuclear weapons as stipulated by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Australia has expressed concern for some Member States' continued noninvolvement with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Australia is convinced that, through the efforts of the United Nations and other international organizations, pressure can be applied to non-compliant nations to respect and conform to the collective will of the international community. Therefore, Australia seeks a multilateral solution to encourage disarmament and calls upon the support of the members of the Commonwealth of Nations to work together towards the universal adoption of the principles of the NPT. Recently, the Australian government has lauded the efforts by the United States and the Russian Federation to reduce nuclear warheads after both countries signed the Strategic Offensive Reduction Treaty in 2002; we look forward to the reduction of the current stockpiles to approximately 2200-1700 warheads by the end of 2012. Also, we seek the cooperation of both countries at the Conference on Disarmament and hope to use their example to inspire other Member States to support nuclear disarmament, as defined by the tenants of the NPT.

This year at the Conference on Disarmament, Australia also hopes to limit the production and spread of radiological devices, commonly known as "dirty bombs." Australia does not consider these devices to be conventional weapons, but rather a dangerous and elusive breed of weapons. We fail to find legitimate military applications of such weapons; "dirty bombs" are accompanied by the threat of use by terrorist organizations, which is paramount to the security concerns of the members of the UN. Additionally, the Australian government hopes to put greater control over the production of small-scale nuclear weapons in a country's nuclear arsenal, such as surface- to-air-missiles (SAMs) carrying WMDs, through regulatory bodies such as the International Atomic Energy Agency. The deployment of nuclear weapons on the battlefield inherently carries with it several ecological and ethical concerns. Australia supports the creation of multilateral channels to develop regional and international policies that address the transportation and distribution of radioactive materials, including depleted uranium.

II. Evaluating the Restrictions on the Testing and Use of Ballistic Missiles

The current state of ballistic missile production is a matter of great concern to the Commonwealth of Australia. Historically, Australia has taken a strong stance against the proliferation of long-range ballistic missiles and has also sought to end the proliferation of Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles (IRBMs), which typically have a range of 3000-5500 kilometers and can deliver most types of WMDs. Nuclear states possessing IRBMs are capable of inflicting incredible amounts of damage on nearby nations, thereby possessing the capability to destroy large civilian populations. The events of the Cold War show the danger of missile proliferation. For example, the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 demonstrates the potential of IRBMs to instigate full-scale military mobilization and war. The Commonwealth of Australia holds that IRBMs represent a threat to international security concerns.

In 1990, Australia joined the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) of 1987. Today, the MTCR specifically focuses on preventing terrorist groups from accessing missile technology. However, treaties like the MTCR require the full participation of all nations to effectively fulfill their goals. Therefore, in light of recent acquisitions and transfers of IRBMs, Australia encourages Member States to acknowledge the principles of the MTCR and seek methods to implement appropriate policies.

As one of the original signatories of the Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation of 2002 (HCoC), the Commonwealth of Australia reaffirms its support of the regulation of the production of intermediate range ballistic missiles. When Australia hosted the MTCRs 23rd Plenary Meeting in 2006, delegates discussed how to supplement the treaty on a national level. Since then, Australia considers the appropriate response to the threat of IRBMs to be national legislative action among several key Member States. Therefore, Australia hopes to establish a regime similar to the MTCR with greater influence in promoting the regulation of the spread of missile technology among UN Member States, discouraging the continued operation of IRBM's, and increasing transparency between all nations while respecting political sovereignty.

III. Addressing the Need for Small Arms Control in Post-Conflict Zones

The transfer of illegal small arms in post conflict areas represents a vital threat to the political stability and socio-economic growth of developing nations. Australia extends its full support to the control and reduction of the illegal arms trade in post-conflict areas of the world. Australia is a proponent of disarmament in developing nations in order to ensure the security of both regional and international actors. Australia has been integral in the progression of small arms control and disarmament. In 2006, Australia helped draft the UN General Assembly Resolution 61/89 "Towards an Arms Treaty" (ATT) and was involved in the Group of Government Experts (GGE27) with 27 other Member States, which responds to the concerns of the ATT. In 2009, Australia began meeting within an Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) to address small arms control, and in the same year co-authored 2009 UN General Assembly Resolution 64/48. Australia hopes to cooperate with nations to push for more effective measures concerning the reduction and control of small arms in post-conflict areas.

Australia recognizes every state's intrinsic individual and collective rights to possessing weapons for defense purposes and to manufacture conventional weapons for security, as defined by Article 51 of the UN Charter. We do, however, encourage the help of other member states to limit the current manufacture and transfer of illegal small arms, specifically within post-conflict areas. Achieving greater control over the transfer of illegal small arms not only increases international security, but promotes social and economic growth within these areas. Failure to control small arms transfer will stagnate a country's economy and sterilize its social growth, and could also escalate into a direct threat to international security.

