

Presentation by
Mr Bill Frilay
on behalf of Social Policy Connections
at the
‘New Clear Exchange’ Workshop
Melbourne,
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Who/what is SPC?

Social Policy Connections is an independent, ecumenical organisation, motivated and informed by Christian social thinking. Our purpose is to expand awareness of social justice issues in Australia and overseas, and to influence public policy for the benefit of all people, especially the most disadvantaged. SPC is not aligned with any political party. SPC is relatively new. It was formed in 2007 and our immediate email and mail network consists of over 300 people (though our email is forwarded to several thousand others via social justice networks).

Bruce was the prime mover for this and I think what drove him was that the Christian religions have a treasury of writings and work on social justice issues that could be utilised in the public sphere. This involves issues ranging from overseas aid and Millennium Development Goals, to Indigenous welfare, financial issues, environmental challenges, immigration and so on.

How did we get involved in Nuclear Nonproliferation?

About 12 months ago, Bruce received an email from Dimity Hawkins, the Melbourne campaign director for ICAN (the International Campaign to abolish Nuclear Weapons) about the upcoming Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Treaties Review on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament. Dimity was appealing for groups to make submissions. He and I discussed



it and agreed that we would. The problem was we had no claim to special expertise on this. So we had a thoroughly enjoyable coffee discussion with Dimity, and I prepared the submission. This meant a crash course in the field and over a month we learnt a lot... but we are not in the same league as the experts in ICAN and other NGOs.

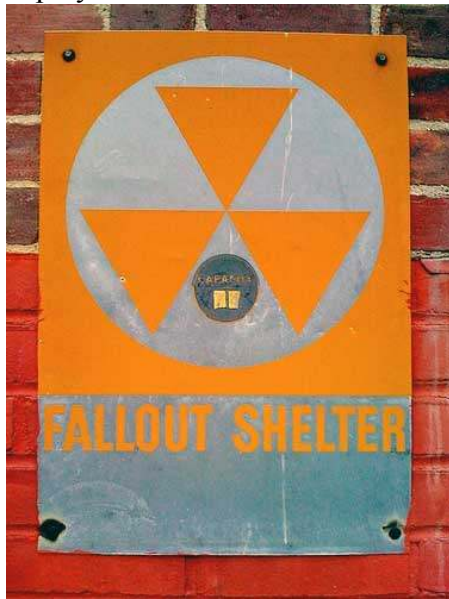
As well as our submission I went with ICAN and other NGOs for meetings with Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and others in Canberra in the lead up to the NPT PrepCom meeting in May 2009. This was also a learning experience to rub shoulders with the other NGOs who obviously had a great depth of knowledge about the issues.

Why are we involved?

Starting from first principles there are of course the teachings of Christ. Christ espoused love and peace throughout his mission. This, the Sermon on the Mount and the Beatitudes, parables such as the Good Samaritan, love of your enemies as well as neighbour are all squarely counter to nuclear proliferation and the threat to humanity that this poses.

What are the Christian churches doing in this day and age?

Among the many Anglican and Protestant church statements against nuclear weapons, the Sixth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1983 stated: 'We believe that the time has come when the churches must unequivocally declare that the production and deployment as well as the use of nuclear weapons are a crime against humanity and that



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such activities must be condemned on ethical and theological grounds. Furthermore, we appeal for the institution of a universal covenant to this effect so that nuclear weapons and warfare are delegitimised and condemned as violations of international law.'¹

In the United States, the National Council of Churches, representing 140,000 Protestant congregations, along with Pax Christi, in 2004 declared nuclear weapons 'inherently immoral'.

The Catholic Church has also firmly opposed the use of nuclear weapons and their proliferation, most importantly the Holy See itself with its specialised agencies, and the US Catholic bishops who have played a significant role in debating defence policy in the United States.

In their land-mark 1983 document, *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and our Response*, the US bishops endorsed the Second Vatican Council's statement: 'The arms race is one of the greatest curses on the human race, an act of aggression against the poor and a folly which does not provide the security it promises' (from *The Church in the Modern World*, #81).

Indicative of the role the churches are playing in helping mobilise public opinion to curtail nuclear proliferation is the advocacy of the Holy See and its agencies. The Holy See was in 1957 a foundation member of the Atoms for Peace agency within the UN (later the IAEA). The Holy See had signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in February 1971, and consistently argued its moral position against nuclear weapons, especially through its representatives in UN forums, where, as in 1997 and 1998, it argued for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons.

There have been many statements and actions since, but to refer to a few recent ones:

¹ 'Interfaith questionnaire on Elimination of Nuclear Weapons: US presidential candidates' responses', in *Disarmament Diplomacy*, 50 (September 2000), at www.acronym.org.uk/dd/dd50/50views.htm.

- On 24 September 2009, the Vatican representative argued in his speech to the UN Security Council for serious and concrete steps towards nuclear disarmament: 'Today's world demands a courageous leadership in reducing those arsenals to a complete zero.'²
- Similar communiqués have been made by the Vatican, along with Catholic Church authorities in the UK, Germany, Italy and the United States and elsewhere.
- Episcopal conferences in Europe and the United States have especially lobbied their governments to pursue vigorously current opportunities to set in place a process to eliminate nuclear weapons completely.
- Speaking as a member of the US bishops' conference Committee on International Justice and Peace, Archbishop Edwin O'Brien of Baltimore at the Global Zero Summit in Paris on 3 February 2010 urged the complete elimination of nuclear weapons, including of so-called 'mini-nukes' that would lower the barriers to further proliferation and use of nuclear weapons. He urged that the United States ratify a new arms reduction treaty with the Russian Federation, ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, and reject any first-use of nuclear weapons or their use against non-nuclear threats.³

Archbishop O'Brien had on 29 July 2009 developed his views more comprehensively in a keynote speech at the invitation of the US Strategic Command at the Deterrence



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² Archbishop Dominique Mamberti, Vatican Secretary for Relations with States, to UN Security Council, 24 September 2009, at www.vatican.va/roman_curia/secretariat_state/2009/documents/rc_seg-st_20090924_mamberti-security-council_en.html

³ Archbishop Edwin F O'Brien, "Remarks at Global Zero Summit", 3 February 2010, <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/global-zero-summit-2010-obrien.pdf>

Symposium. He had insisted that strong safeguards would be needed to ensure that all countries implemented disarmament treaties, and that the development of peaceful use of nuclear energy needed to be under the strict control of the IAEA, which itself needed to be strengthened to perform its role fully. He added that religious leaders must help build public support to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, and also the Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty to prohibit further production of weapons-grade uranium and plutonium.⁴

- In a wide-ranging address on challenges to the environment and peace in many countries, Pope Benedict in his annual address to the Diplomatic Corps on 10 January 2010 hoped that ‘during the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference to be held this May in New York, effective decisions will be made towards progressive disarmament, with a view to freeing our planet from nuclear arms.’⁵

Our Submission

What, then did we say in our submission to the Senate Committee?

We had a similar objective to everyone, but we urged that Australia take an active role given its relatively unique position as a middle power, a country not perceived as threatening, and having good relations with all. We also said:

- people of faith communities are very concerned about this issue, and very much wish this initiative to succeed. Indeed, in the western world, the churches have played major roles in the development of the just war and pacifist traditions, both aiming to constrain warfare. They continue to maintain and develop these traditions cogently in their educational works and public advocacy.
- People of all the major faith traditions – Christian, Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist – all hold peace and peacemaking as very much at the core of their beliefs and values. Peace in the world today will depend greatly on the ability of these great religious traditions to clarify and articulate internationally agreed moral restraints on violence and warfare, and especially to delegitimise jihadist or fundamentalist appeals to violence.



UN speaker Sergio de Queiroz Duarte at the 'Against Nuclear Arms' exhibition, New York, 2009. UN Photo/Paulo Filgueiras, flickr CC

⁴ Archbishop Edwin F O'Brien, "Nuclear Weapons and Moral Questions: the Path to Zero" to the 2009 Deterrence Symposium, Omaha, Nebraska, , 29 July 2009, <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/nuclearzero.shtml>.

⁵ Pope Benedict to Diplomatic Corps, 11 January 2010, at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2010/january/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20100111_diplomatic-corps_en.html

- These people of faith globally have a vast constituency which could be a major positive force on this issue, helping to mobilise public opinion and activist groups in support of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation as a moral imperative at this dangerous point in human history.

SPC's timing has been fortuitous. There have obviously been bleak years earlier this decade for this issue – it must have been very frustrating for many of the NGOs. We came into this a year ago, and it is great to see some potential for real movement on this. (I'd like to think it was us!) But Copenhagen showed how difficult international consensus can be, and this will have a long way to go.

We look forward to continuing our small involvement with this and working with ICAN and others. Thank you.