

NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION: THE CONTINUING CHALLENGE

Address by the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Senator Gareth Evans, to the Fourth NPT Review Conference, Geneva, 23 August 1990

Permit me at the outset to congratulate you, Mr President, on your election to the Presidency of this important conference. I had the pleasure of welcoming you to Canberra only a few weeks ago and noted then that there has long been a very cordial and cooperative relationship between Australia and Peru. I can assure you that you will have the fullest cooperation from my delegation in your important task of leading this conference to a successful conclusion.

The world has lived with nuclear weapons for 45 years. The unparalleled destructive power of nuclear arsenals, their capacity to wipe out humanity, has weighed heavily upon the world and put at risk the future of our children. The enormity of the stake spurred our disarmament efforts, which seemed at best able to hold the line.

Now we have witnessed historic global change over the last year, producing an international political environment fundamentally different from any time since the Second World War. We stand at one of history's watersheds, and have in front of us new opportunities for building a less mistrustful and more secure world. The end of the Cold War, and superpower confrontation, and the understandings and agreements which have resulted, offer new hope of lifting the oppressive threat of global strategic nuclear war.

But there is absolutely no room for any complacent assumption that nuclear holocaust is no longer a horror the world need fear. The marked decline of tension in what was known as the central balance has not carried over uniformly to a decline in regional confrontations. The indefensible aggression by Iraq against its fellow Arab and sovereign neighbour, Kuwait, which warrants the most forthright condemnation by the international community, is the first crucial test of crisis management in the post Cold War era. The events in the Middle East provide a sharp reminder that deep enmities persist in many parts of our world, that naked aggression is still not a thing of the past. And the capacity of various nations to rapidly develop nuclear weapons is all too unhappily apparent, not only in the Middle East, but in a number of other traditionally volatile regions of the world as well.

That persistence of conflict means that our joint effort at building confidence and underpinning security is no less urgent than it ever was - and indeed in some ways is even

more urgent. And none of us here have any grounds for thinking that regional conflicts can be insulated, their effects contained to the immediate neighbourhood. We all feel the repercussions of these conflicts - not least in our economies, but certainly too in our national security. In an interdependent world, we all have a shared interest in ensuring that the great discoveries of the nuclear age are employed peacefully and constructively for social and economic development, and a shared interest in containing and eventually eliminating the atom's destructive power. Nuclear disarmament and the prevention of nuclear weapons proliferation must remain central objectives of the international community.

The NPT - now 20 years old - was a product of a fearful world, in the midst of the Cold War. It was a bold statement of commitment to constructing a better future in which states would put their faith in international arrangements and turn their backs on the option of building their own nuclear weapons. It recognized the grave consequences for international security of both the spread of nuclear weapons beyond those states which already had them and the continued growth of existing nuclear arsenals. It provided for the first time for international on-site inspection and verification of peaceful nuclear activities, to give states the confidence they sought about the intentions of their neighbours.

Despite the fact that a number of countries of proliferation concern have not become members, the Treaty has had remarkable success in its 20 years. It is the most widely adhered-to arms control agreement in existence and its membership continues to grow. It has acquired a position of irreducible importance for the international community as the norm for responsible international behaviour in the nuclear field. It has become a pillar of the international and regional security framework. It has become the foundation for most international trade and cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. Without the assurances offered by the NPT and the system of IAEA safeguards, distrust of nuclear intentions would feed regional security problems. Without the assurances offered by the NPT, international nuclear trade and cooperation would dwindle.

But as the world community starts to map out its future for the twenty-first century, the NPT and its continued success must not be taken for granted. The Treaty will only continue to play the role we want it to play with the active support and strong commitment of its members. That includes making renewed efforts to achieve, through dialogue with non-parties, universality of membership for the Treaty.

It would be a supreme irony and a tragedy if the progress in nuclear arms control which is beginning to take place between the superpowers were accompanied in the next few years by a proliferation of other countries acquiring nuclear weapons. The world must seize the opportunity provided by the reduction in tensions between the superpowers to find solutions to regional conflicts. The sources of insecurity in some regions cannot be allowed to develop to the point where they lead to the further proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Since the last Review Conference the wider security framework, of which the NPT is a part, has grown from strength to strength. Membership of the Treaty has grown to 141. There has been significant progress in nuclear arms control between the superpowers. The Conference on Disarmament has recently agreed on a mandate for the re-establishment of an Ad Hoc Committee to discuss the question of a Nuclear Test Ban. In the South Pacific, the Treaty of Rarotonga has entered into force.

Cooperation between NPT members in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy has remained strong. Resources available to the IAEA for its cooperation program have continued to grow despite the need for financial constraints on international organisations. Regional nuclear cooperation in the Asia/Pacific has developed strongly. There is now a regional agreement well-established in Latin America and we are pleased to welcome at this Conference the recent establishment of a regional agreement for Africa.

Since the last Review Conference in 1985 new factors have gained prominence in discussion of the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. Chernobyl has given renewed emphasis to international cooperation in nuclear safety. Two important international conventions on early warning of nuclear accidents and assistance in the event of an accident have been negotiated and have entered into force. Australia has ratified both conventions and would like to see the widest possible adherence to them. Concerns about the quality of the environment and the serious effects which global warming would have on it have led to a reassessment of the place of nuclear power.

There have, however, also been some disturbing developments since the last Review Conference - developments in the area of nuclear supply and lack of progress in concluding safeguards agreements with the IAEA

In 1985, the final document of the Review Conference called on all nuclear suppliers in their nuclear cooperation and export policies to work towards the objective of full scope safeguards as the basic condition of supply. This recognised the fact that supply to non-parties on a less stringent basis than to Treaty members neither contributed to the objective of the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons nor represented a benefit in nuclear cooperation for Treaty members.

My Government warmly welcomes decisions by some major nuclear suppliers since 1985 to adopt a policy of fullscope safeguards for nuclear supply. In this context, Australia warmly welcomes the decision by Japan and the decision announced yesterday by the

distinguished Foreign Minister of the FRG to adopt a policy of fullscope safeguards for nuclear supply. But we and many other countries regret that over the last five years a small number of suppliers have entered into agreements to supply major nuclear items to non-parties without requiring fullscope safeguards. It is a matter of special regret that among the suppliers concerned are members of this Treaty.

At this turning point in history we have a great opportunity to strengthen non-proliferation in a direct and practical way. My government believes such a chance may not come again and must be seized. We would therefore like to see this Conference adopt a clear statement that henceforth supply of nuclear items under new agreements should only take place on the basis of fullscope safeguards. Australia in company with a number of other parties will be circulating a proposal to this effect.

Another development of concern to Australia is that not all states parties have exhibited by their actions and their words the full support for the objective of nuclear non-proliferation which Treaty membership requires. It is crucial that parties adhere to their commitments, and be seen to adhere to those commitments, both through the verification activities of the IAEA and through the actions and public statements of states themselves. Some actions and statements of one or two parties have called into question their intention to abide by their obligations in the future. This is not acceptable behaviour for parties of this Treaty.

Furthermore, there has been disappointing progress in the conclusion of safeguards agreements with the IAEA. More than fifty such agreements remain outstanding. There is a particular concern when members of the Treaty actually operate nuclear facilities without safeguards and do not quickly comply with their clear obligation to conclude a safeguards agreement. Australia urges a renewed effort by parties to the Treaty and by the Director-General of the IAEA to encourage the conclusion of these agreements.

Australia is particularly concerned that the DPRK, having joined the Treaty almost five years ago, continues to operate an unsafeguarded nuclear facility. We and many other members of the IAEA Board of Governors have expressed these concerns on many occasions. Frankly, we see the DPRK's continued failure to conclude its safeguards agreement as most inappropriate behaviour by a member of this Treaty, as an unhelpful

element of uncertainty in the security situation in Asia and the Pacific, and as one of the obstacles to improved bilateral relations with other states. We hope the North Korean delegation will report to its Government the depth of concern there is in this conference about the continuation of the current situation.

The existence of unsafeguarded facilities in non-nuclear weapon states inevitably raises questions about their use, increases suspicions, and undermines regional and global security. Australia calls on all states outside the Treaty to adhere to the Treaty as soon as possible, to place all their nuclear activities under fullscope safeguards and to work together within the NPT for a more secure world.

Looking ahead to 1995, I believe we have reason for optimism. I sense a renewed recognition by members of the Treaty of the importance of the confidence it inspires for regional security and for nuclear trade and cooperation.

Between now and 1995 there is the prospect of a further significant increase in membership. My Government looks forward to the day - now not very far distant, we hope - when consequent on changes beginning to take place in South Africa, the whole of southern Africa will together be part of this Treaty. I warmly welcome the presence at this conference of representatives of China and France and hope that their reexamination of their attitude to the Treaty will result in early membership.

There is also reason for optimism in the state of relations between the superpowers and the demonstrated commitment of both countries to work towards further disarmament agreements. We have much to applaud, since 1985, with the INF Agreement eliminating an entire class of nuclear weapons; with the START Agreement, bringing about significant cuts in strategic arsenals, very close to finalisation; and with an emerging commitment to START as an ongoing process, not merely an end in itself.

But for all the change in atmosphere, and for all the disarmament progress that has already been made, there are still in existence some 50,000 nuclear warheads with a destructive capacity of nearly 16,000 megatons - equivalent to 3.3 tons of TNT for every man, woman and child on earth, or, to put it another way, 800,000 times the force of the bomb which destroyed Hiroshima.

The commitment to work not only towards the cessation of the nuclear arms race, but towards genuine nuclear disarmament is a central obligation of the NPT. For Australia a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty and a chemical weapons convention remain key priorities. Both agreements would play a major role in the disarmament process and in preventing further proliferation. But the NPT is central to preventing nuclear proliferation

and in the process of pursuing a CTB, we should not jeopardize the NPT. We should also recognize that there is no substitute for hard work in the Conference on Disarmament if we are to produce a properly verified treaty.

There are also challenges ahead for the NPT - challenges which, if ignored, can undermine the credibility and effectiveness of the Treaty to the detriment of all of us.

I have mentioned a number of them already. There is the challenge of maintaining momentum in nuclear arms control; of resolving regional disputes which could lead to further proliferation; of encouraging all parties to comply in word and deed with the obligations of the Treaty; and of finding the necessary resources for the IAEA to carry out its responsibilities at a time when there are significant new developments in the nuclear fuel cycle.

I would like to say just a few more words about this last challenge. The 1990s will see a number of developments in the nuclear fuel cycle relevant to the IAEA's safeguards responsibilities. A steady increase is forecast for the construction of power reactors. There will be an increase in commercial reprocessing, including in at least one non-nuclear weapon state. The rate of plutonium separation and the use of the separated material will be higher. The quantity of spent fuel stored will increase with some stored away from reactors.

These developments will place additional pressures on the IAEA. The safeguarding of fuel cycle processing facilities is already absorbing a significant proportion of the Agency's safeguards resources. Safeguards arrangements, possibly more demanding of resources, will need to be developed for large scale commercial reprocessing facilities and for the manufacture and use of mixed oxide fuels. The question of whether and at what point safeguards on disposed waste can be terminated will need to be resolved.

It is of central importance to the continued effectiveness of the NPT that the IAEA has the resources, both human and financial, to carry out its international legal responsibilities in the application of safeguards. Maintaining the credibility and effectiveness of IAEA safeguards needs to be a clear objective of every member of this Treaty.

We all have cause for optimism about the continued strength of the NPT and the contribution it will make to international and regional security in the 1990s. The Treaty is no less important now, as the world maps out the future for the 21st Century, than it was when it was founded 20 years ago. Indeed, the momentous changes to the international order of the last two years have given us a better chance to make the world safer from the threat of nuclear proliferation than at any time in the Treaty's life.

We need to recognise, however, that there are challenges in the path ahead and the Treaty will not remain effective if its members take it for granted. The NPT will continue to play the vital role we see for it only if its members provide active support and strong commitment. Australia will play its part and exert its efforts to ensure that the objectives of the Treaty are achieved. We see the NPT as a permanent feature of the international security framework and are committed to its continuation in force indefinitely after 1995.