

12 June 2008

The Hon. Kevin Rudd, MP
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister Rudd:

We would like to offer you our sincere thanks and congratulations for taking up the cause of a nuclear weapons free world so unequivocally during your recent visit to Hiroshima. Your proposal for an International Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament Commission is exactly the kind of initiative that is required if we are to move beyond the piecemeal approach to arms control and non-proliferation that has resulted in gridlock for so long. We are very pleased that someone as distinguished, capable and committed as former Foreign Minister Gareth Evans will co-chair the Commission and congratulate you on his appointment.

Nuclear weapons are the ultimate weapons of terror. As physicians who have studied the medical consequences of nuclear explosions, we know that even a relatively small nuclear weapon—approximately the size of the bomb that destroyed Hiroshima in 1945—detonated in a modern city would kill hundreds of thousands of people and overwhelm the capacity of any health care system, and that the radiation from the explosion itself and from fallout would sicken surviving populations as well as rescuers attempting to help them. Extrapolate these casualties to the more than 20,000 nuclear weapons currently in the world's arsenals, and the consequences become unimaginable, making any kind of meaningful medical response impossible. The continued existence of nuclear weapons, given this knowledge, is something that no responsible leader can condone. We applaud you for speaking out so strongly for their elimination.

A roadmap to a nuclear-weapons-free world already exists. International lawyers, scientists, and physicians drafted a Model Nuclear Weapons Convention in 1997, providing a detailed description of the overall framework, incremental steps, and verification processes that would complete the task of global nuclear disarmament within an agreed upon timeframe. We commend the model Convention to you and the Commission you have established. The goal of nuclear abolition—and its practical feasibility—has been endorsed by diplomats and statesmen from across the political spectrum. The International Court of Justice has asserted that commencement and completion of negotiations for nuclear disarmament are an obligation under international law.



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A Nuclear Weapons Convention would fulfill and deliver on the promise of the NPT, which is under serious strain. Thirty-eight years after the entry into force of the NPT, further states have acquired nuclear weapons, proliferation dangers are not under control, and the nuclear weapons states have not only failed to deliver on their disarmament obligations, but have continued to develop and deploy new nuclear weapons, and lowered the threshold for their use. Support for such a Convention has been growing in the UN General Assembly. Last year, 127 countries voted in favor of a resolution (A/62/391) calling for “multilateral negotiations leading to an early conclusion of a nuclear weapons convention.” We were deeply disappointed that Australia abstained from that vote in 2007, and we hope that your government will vote in favor of this and other nuclear disarmament resolutions that come before the GA this year.

Even more important than constructive votes in the GA, the cause of a nuclear weapons free world needs leaders and champions — leaders and governments willing to take the lead in building international support, coalitions, and practical steps towards a Nuclear Weapons Convention, as Canada did for the Mine Ban Treaty more than a decade ago, and Norway has done more recently for cluster munitions. Australia, which convened the Canberra Commission in 1995, has the diplomatic credentials to step forward as that champion. We urge you to consider taking on this historic task.

IPPNW is joined by its affiliates—national medical organizations in 60 countries—in making this appeal. Our Australian affiliate, MAPW, is already in frequent communication with your government about these issues, and they have the full support of our entire federation. IPPNW received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1985 for our work to educate the world’s people and leaders, particularly of the US and the former Soviet Union, about the abhorrent nature of nuclear weapons and the absolute need to prevent nuclear war. No one would be more deserving of a future Nobel Peace Prize than the world leader who paves the way toward lifting the shadow of Hiroshima from future generations.

We stand ready to assist and support the work of the Commission in any way that we can.

With respect and hope,



Ime John
Co-President



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Co-President



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Co-President