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NZ government's position on a nuclear weapons convention

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While it was very encouraging that Maryan Street's Notice of Motion on the achievement of a nuclear-weapons-free world (text available at <http://www.icanw.org.nz>) received cross-party support in parliament yesterday, the government nevertheless still appears to be opposed to a fast-track diplomatic process to negotiate a nuclear weapons convention according to a statement made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the House of Representatives yesterday:

"The position of successive New Zealand Governments has been one of general support for such a convention when circumstances are such that it has a realistic chance of success, and in the meantime to focus on practical measures to reduce nuclear dangers. I am advised that the prospects of successfully negotiating such a treaty at the present time would be poor. For that reason, at Government level internationally, there are no serious moves afoot to get negotiations on a convention under way." - see full text below.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs statement mirrors the briefing given by Ministry of Foreign Affairs' officials at the Select Committee hearing on the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons Aotearoa New Zealand (iCAN ANZ) petition which calls on the government:

"to actively engage with 'like-minded' governments committed to abolishing nuclear weapons to launch, without delay, an initiative to start the process of negotiating a Nuclear Weapons Convention - a treaty to prohibit the development, production, testing, deployment, stockpiling, transfer, threat of use, and use of nuclear weapons."

The government appears to be ignoring recent developments, including the Norwegian government's announcement that it will convene an international conference in Oslo next year to highlight aspects of nuclear weapons as a humanitarian problem (see [Norway announces nuclear weapons conference: an opportunity for New Zealand](#)); and to be back-tracking on recent statements made at international forums.

For example, the Joint Statement on the humanitarian dimension of nuclear disarmament by Austria, Chile, Costa Rica, Denmark, Holy See, Egypt, Indonesia, Ireland, Malaysia, Mexico, **New Zealand**, Nigeria, Norway, Philippines, South Africa, Switzerland (First Session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2015 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, 2 May 2012) included:

"It is of utmost importance that these weapons never be used again, under any circumstances. The only way to guarantee this is the total, irreversible and verifiable elimination of nuclear weapons, under effective international control, including through the full implementation of Article VI of the NPT. All States must intensify their efforts to outlaw nuclear weapons and achieve a world free of nuclear weapons."

Nothing there about poor prospects for a nuclear weapons convention ...

12. Nuclear Weapons Convention Government Support

[Sitting date: 31 May 2012. Hansard Volume: 680, Page 15. Text is subject to correction.]

12. Dr KENNEDY GRAHAM (Green) to the Minister of Foreign Affairs: Will New Zealand promote immediate negotiations on a Nuclear Weapons Convention prohibiting their development, production, stockpiling and use?

Hon MURRAY McCULLY (Minister of Foreign Affairs): The position of successive New Zealand Governments has been one of general support for such a convention when circumstances are such that it has a realistic chance of success, and in the meantime to focus on practical measures to reduce nuclear dangers. I am advised that the prospects of successfully negotiating such a treaty at the present time would be poor. For that reason, at Government level internationally, there are no serious moves afoot to get negotiations on a convention under way.

Dr Kennedy Graham: Given our nuclear-free policy and the fact that a convention is supported by the United Nations Secretary-General as a practical plan now, not in the future, should we not support all resolutions calling for the convention and a nuclear-free world generally?

Hon MURRAY McCULLY: As I alluded in my primary answer, the Governments position on that, and the position of previous Governments, is one of general support.

Dr Kennedy Graham: Does he agree, given that global support is 76 percent in favour of a nuclear weapons convention, according to a world public opinion poll, that New Zealand would be in tune with the world mood in advancing this goal now, not at some indeterminate time in the future?

Hon MURRAY McCULLY: As I indicated in my primary answer, the Governments position and that of its predecessors is generally one of support, but it has been determined that it would be useful to place some effort into promoting such an outcome when there is some prospect of success. In the meantime the Government puts its efforts into immediate steps to try to reduce nuclear dangers.

Dr Kennedy Graham: Does the Minister agree that any use of nuclear weapons would be a violation of the United Nations Charter and a crime against humanity, as affirmed last December in UN Resolution 66/57?

Hon MURRAY McCULLY: I would not want to provide an answer to a specific question based on the interpretation of that charter. What I would say is that the Government, as its predecessors have done, takes the view that we should work actively to ensure that the nuclear dangers that attend the world are reduced through whatever means are practical at the time.

Dr Kennedy Graham: I seek leave to table three documents. The first is UN General Assembly document A/62/650, which is a letter from the Costa Rican and Malaysian Governments to the Secretary-General setting out a model nuclear weapons convention as an immediate practical goal.

Mr SPEAKER: Leave is sought to table that document. Is there any objection? There is objection.

Dr Kennedy Graham: There is?

Mr SPEAKER: There is objection. Does the member wish to seek ...

Dr Kennedy Graham: The second document is UN Resolution A/Res/66/57, which endorses a convention on the prohibition on the use of nuclear weapons.

Mr SPEAKER: Leave is sought to table that document. Is there any objection? There is objection.

Dr Kennedy Graham: And the third document is a document by the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, which sets out the public opinion poll showing 76 percent of the world opinion in favour.

Mr SPEAKER: Leave is sought to table that document. Is there any objection? There is objection.

Hon Maryan Street: Is the Minister aware of a report that John Key could not recall how he felt about New Zealand's anti-nuclear stance at the time of the passage of the legislation; if he is, is he concerned that the Prime Minister has lost a decade somewhere along the line, because he could not remember his position on the Springbok Tour either?

Hon MURRAY McCULLY: What I can say is that amongst the steps that New Zealand is taking in the short term to reduce nuclear dangers attending the world is the outstanding leadership that the Prime Minister brought to the nuclear summit held recently in Seoul.

- http://www.parliament.nz/en-NZ/PB/Business/QOA/0/4/5/50HansQ_20120531_00000012-12-Nuclear-Weapons-Convention-Government.htm