

Australia's boycott of UN nuclear disarmament negotiations

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The Australian government, at the behest of the United States, has decided to boycott major UN nuclear disarmament negotiations beginning on 27 March. It argues that US nuclear weapons are essential for Australia's security and therefore should not be prohibited under international law.

"Australia is turning its back on the UN at a time when multilateral approaches to global challenges are more important than ever," said ICAN's Asia-Pacific director, Tim Wright. "Achieving greater progress towards a world free of nuclear weapons is very much in Australia's security interests."

Under the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty, Australia is legally required to pursue negotiations in good faith for nuclear disarmament. "Australia's failure to participate in the upcoming negotiations casts serious doubt on its commitment to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and indeed to the UN," said Wright.

"Every country in Southeast Asia and nearly all countries in the Pacific have declared their strong support for the upcoming UN negotiations. Australia will be sitting in self-imposed exile from one of the biggest and most important international treaty-making initiatives in recent history.

"Almost all Australians support positive action for the abolition of nuclear weapons. They want the government to promote global security and work to reduce the nuclear threat. But our politicians are instead taking orders from the Trump administration. This is an extremely worrying development.

"Nuclear weapons are the only weapons of mass destruction not yet prohibited under international law, despite their catastrophic effects on people and the environment. The upcoming UN negotiations aim to rectify this legal anomaly and spur long-overdue action for disarmament.

"This will be the first time that Australia has ever boycotted disarmament negotiations. We're a party to treaties prohibiting chemical weapons, biological weapons, landmines and cluster munitions. It beggars belief that the government is now refusing to negotiate a ban on nuclear weapons.

"At a time of great global tension and instability, it's grossly irresponsible for Australia to be boycotting this crucial UN process. The foreign minister, Julie Bishop, is tarnishing Australia's reputation and undermining our security. She has made an extraordinary decision that must be strongly challenged."

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