
Top Aussies call for nuclear weapons ban

By Katina Curtis, AAP

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More than 700 prominent Australians have called on the government to show leadership on outlawing nuclear weapons, saying the need is urgent.

Australians for a Nuclear Weapons Convention is a group of 713 Order of Australia honorees who say there is a growing consensus among world leaders on the urgent need for a ban on nuclear weapons.

"The increasing risks of nuclear weapons proliferation and use in our region and beyond mean there has never been a more important time for Australian initiative and leadership in global efforts to free the world from nuclear weapons," a statement from the group says.

They want Australia to support UN Secretary-General Ban-Ki Moon's call for negotiations on an international treaty that would outlaw and eliminate all nuclear weapons.

Former prime ministers Malcolm Fraser, Bob Hawke and Gough Whitlam, and former foreign ministers Gareth Evans and Andrew Peacock are among the signatories.

Professor Evans has long been active in government work against nuclear weapons, having chaired an international commission on non-proliferation and disarmament from 2008 to 2010.

Mr Fraser's government established the convention that Australia would only sell uranium to countries that had signed the non-proliferation treaty.

Eight former state premiers and four former armed forces chiefs as well as prominent media, literary, sporting and community personalities also endorsed the statement.

"We wanted to show that nuclear disarmament isn't a left-wing issue. This is something that has support across the political spectrum," campaign director Tim Wright told AAP.

"Nuclear disarmament is something that we as a nation should care about and that the government should show leadership on.

"This is an urgent threat that needs urgent attention."

He said while Australia had been a leader in non-proliferation activities in the past, its position was undermined by current defence policies stating the importance of the US having nuclear weapons and moves to sell uranium to India, which makes nuclear weapons.

"Although the government does state that it supports nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament,

that position isn't matched by its actions," he told AAP.

Former Victorian premier Steve Bracks hoped Australia could become a "prime mover" on a new nuclear weapons convention.

"International co-operation provides the only route to a nuclear weapons-free world," he said.

The campaign will be launch formally on Thursday, after attracting signatories for much of the past year.

"Australia Day 2012 is an appropriate day for all Australians to nail their colours to the mast for an eventually nuclear weapons-free world," said scientist Gustav Nossal, who was Australian of the Year in 2000.

"The convention is already supported by a veritable legion of Australian leaders, and I now call on the Australian public to raise their voices for a truly important cause."

Mr Wright said while the Australians for a Nuclear Weapons Convention campaign was open only to people appointed to the Order of Australia, others could take part in activities run by the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN).

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