

Canberra Commission, 1996

*On October 24, 1995 (United Nations Day) Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating announced the formation of the Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons. Its members were 17 international experts. **The Report of the Canberra Commission**, [<http://www.gs institute.org/archives/000007.shtml>] issued in August 1996, made the case for the elimination of nuclear weapons and offered concrete recommendations on how this could be accomplished.*

Members

*Celso Amorin, Brazil
General Lee Butler, United States
Richard Butler, Australia
Field Marshall Lord Michael Carver,
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Jacques-Yves Cousteau, France
Jayantha Dhanapala, Sri Lanka
Rolf Ekeus, Sweden
Mabil Elaraby, Egypt
Ryukichi Imai, Japan
Ronald McCoy, Malaysia
Robert McNamara, United States
Robert O'Neill, United Kingdom
Qian Jiadong, China
Michael Rocard, France
Joseph Rotblat, United Kingdom
Roald Sagdeev, United States
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Statement of the Commissioners

The Canberra Commission report opened with the following statement of the commissioners:

The destructiveness of nuclear weapons is immense. Any use would be catastrophic.

Nuclear weapons pose an intolerable threat to all humanity and its habitat, yet tens of thousands remain in arsenals built up at an extraordinary time of deep antagonism. That time has passed, yet assertions of their utility continue.

These facts are obvious but their implications have been blurred. There is no doubt that, if the peoples of the world were more fully aware of the inherent danger of nuclear weapons and the consequences of their use, they would reject them, and not permit their continued possession or acquisition on their behalf by

their governments, even for an alleged need for self-defense.

Nuclear weapons are held by a handful of states which insist that these weapons provide unique security benefits, and yet reserve uniquely to themselves the right to own them. This situation is highly discriminatory and thus unstable; it cannot be sustained. The possession of nuclear weapons by any state is a constant stimulus to other states to acquire them.

The world faces threats of nuclear proliferation and nuclear terrorism. These threats are growing. They must be removed.

For these reasons, a central reality is that nuclear weapons diminish the security of all states. Indeed, states which possess them become themselves targets of nuclear weapons.

The opportunity now exists, perhaps without precedent or recurrence, to make a new and clear choice to enable the world to conduct its affairs without nuclear weapons and in accordance with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

The members of the Canberra Commission call upon the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France and China to give the lead by committing themselves, unequivocally, to the elimination of all nuclear weapons. Such a commitment would propel the process in the most direct and imaginative way. All other governments must join this commitment and contribute to its fulfillment.

The Commission has identified a series of steps which can be taken immediately and which would thereupon make the world safer.

The Commission has also described the practical measures which can be taken to bring about the verifiable elimination of nuclear weapons and the full safeguarding of militarily usable nuclear material.

A nuclear weapon free world can be secured and maintained through political commitment, and anchored in an enduring and binding legal framework.

Recommendations for Immediate Steps

The Canberra Commission offered recommendations for a set of immediate steps that could lead to a world free of nuclear weapons:

The first requirement is for the five nuclear weapon states to commit themselves unequivocally to the elimination of nuclear weapons and agree to start work immediately on the practical steps and negotiations required for its achievement....

The commitment by the nuclear weapon states to a nuclear weapon free world must be accompanied by a series of practical, realistic and mutually reinforcing steps. There are a number of such steps that can be taken immediately.... The recommended steps are:

1. Taking nuclear forces off alert.
2. Removal of warheads from delivery vehicles.
3. Ending deployment of non-strategic nuclear weapons.
4. Ending nuclear testing.
5. Initiating negotiations to further reduce United States and Russian nuclear arsenals.
6. Agreement amongst the nuclear weapon states of reciprocal no first use undertakings, and of a non-use undertaking by them in relation to the non-nuclear weapon states.

Reinforcing Steps

The Canberra Commission also recommended the following reinforcing steps:

1. Action to prevent further horizontal proliferation.
2. Developing verification arrangements for a nuclear weapon free world.
3. Cessation of the production of fissile material for nuclear explosive purposes.