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15 March 2012

Mr John Hayes, MP
Chairperson
Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Select Committee
Parliament Buildings
Wellington

**Letter of support for Petition No. 2011/1
(International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons Aotearoa New Zealand)**

Dear Mr Hayes and Committee members,

The Pacific Institute of Resource Management, (PIRM), was founded in 1984 with the idea that Aotearoa/New Zealand could provide an example to the world of a sustainable country. We make submissions to government on a range of issues, hold meetings and publish *Pacific Ecologist* to help educate on key sustainability matters.

Our country's nuclear-free status and legislation is a priceless asset which places Aotearoa/New Zealand in a natural world leadership role on nuclear matters. New Zealanders across the political spectrum are proud we are nuclear free because it means we are known on the world stage as being pro-life and for environmental security. What better principles can we be known and respected for in the world?

Here in the South Pacific, we have learned at close hand of the very long-term dangers of nuclear weapons which have been tested in our region, including those "tested" by France on Moruroa and Faungtaufa atolls over 30 years from 1966 -1996. As a consequence there is an ever present danger that over 510 kg of life-threatening plutonium within the structure of the damaged atolls and lagoons could leak into the Pacific Ocean through an earthquake or as a consequence of global warming, via sea-level rise or stronger weather patterns pressuring the atolls.¹ A 2003 Australian ocean circulation study showed that such a release into the South Pacific marine environment could have large-scale, long-term consequences, with high levels of radioactivity reaching other Pacific Island, South American and Australasian nations within 10 years of the initial release. And even 10 years after such a catastrophic release from Moruroa, contamination of the local marine environment would be 10,000 times greater than current natural radiation levels.² This demonstrates the extraordinary, persistent and dangerous legacy of nuclear weapons testing.

Three quarters of all nations support UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon's proposal for a treaty to outlaw and eliminate nuclear weapons, according to a study released in January by the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons. These nations supporting the ban on nuclear weapons make up around 81% of the world's population. The iCAN study can be found at www.icanw.org/files/TowardsTreatyBanningNuclearWeapons.pdf.

Nuclear weapons are weapons of mass destruction which by their very existence threaten the most indiscriminate violence possible to humanity and the wider environment whose health we depend on for our continued survival. The threat or use of nuclear weapons has been deemed illegal by the World Court in 1996. Possession of such weapons is the antithesis of maintaining peace and security

and must surely also transgress the 1948 Convention on Human Rights. The existence of these weapons in countries which possess them destabilises the political situation in the world with some countries feeling threatened by those who have nuclear weapons. The current situation with Iran being threatened by Israel and the US is an example of this political destabilisation by those possessing nuclear weapon. Merely imposing sanctions on those threatened by other countries nuclear weapons is not a realistic long-term policy. A universal ban, outlawing possession of nuclear weapons is the only sound policy.

Around 8 countries now possess these ecocidal weapons and though there has thankfully been some reduction in their numbers, there are still enough of them around to kill everyone on earth many times over and ruin the future for life on Earth, should they be unleashed, even by accident, or faulty equipment. Release of nuclear weapons by accident is a distinct possibility with some countries keeping their arsenals on high alert, ready to be used within a few minutes. A computer or other equipment failure, or a miscalculation could unleash nuclear weapons from one country to another, and then a chain reaction of nuclear responses is quite possible. What an ignominious fate if our civilisation and life on Earth were to be destroyed by such an error! It would be just as ignominious a fate to destroy the world deliberately with nuclear weapons.

These weapons are a major threat to the health and security of humanity and life on earth. Besides the terrible initial suffering and devastation after their use, nuclear weapons cause very long-lasting genetic damage to humans, and contaminate the land and water. The experience of the people of Kiribati, also the people of the Marshall Islands and the people of French Polynesia attest to the suffering caused by more powerful countries, the UK, France and US, carrying out nuclear weapons experiments on Pacific islands. A 1994 report of the US National Cancer Institute concluded: *“Doses to the thyroid, colon and stomach of persons on Rongelap, Alinginae and to a lesser extent Utrik at the time of the Bravo test in 1954 were extremely high. A high proportion of cancers of these organs that develop among members of those population groups are likely to be radiation related. About 40% of the thyroid cancers and more than one half of cancers to other organs (at all atolls) are yet to be diagnosed. Hence most of the radiation excess is projected to occur in the coming years.”*³

We therefore respectfully call on the House of Representatives, on this 25th anniversary of our nuclear-free status to urge the government to take a strong leadership role as a nuclear-free country to actively engage with like-minded governments committed to abolishing nuclear weapons. We urge your Committee 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 actual use of nuclear weapons.

As an interim move, we call on the government also to take every opportunity to assist in reducing the threat of nuclear weapons by urging nuclear weapons states to take their nuclear arsenals off high alert, and for each to publicly commit to a ‘no first use’ policy, and for each to assure non-nuclear weapon states that they will not be subjected to the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. Such steps would greatly decrease the chance of accidental use of nuclear weapons, and reduce the impetus for nuclear weapons proliferation.

Yours sincerely,
Kay Weir, Editor Pacific Ecologist
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For the Pacific Institute of Resource Management, (PIRM)

1. Professor Lionel Carter, marine geologist, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, on page 27 of *Pacific Ecologist*, issue 20 Winter 2011, *Industrial & Military Activities Poisoning the Oceans* by Kay Weir.
2. *Prediction of the fate of radioactive material in the South Pacific ocean* by Douglas Haxell & Matthew England, 2003,
J. Environment. Radioactivity 65 2003.
3. *Pacific Ecologist* issue 13, Summer 2007, *A Survivor’s warning on nuclear contamination* by Zohl De Ishtar.