



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**PROOF**

**Main Committee**

**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

**Nuclear Testing**

**SPEECH**

**Monday, 7 September 2009**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

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**Mr KELVIN THOMSON** (Wills) (7.04 pm)—The fact that we have now survived over 60 years of the age of nuclear weapons without descending into nuclear holocaust has been the cause of a lot of analysis and discussion. I think one factor that should be acknowledged is the role of the non-government organisations around the world that have stubbornly refused to recognise any legitimate role for nuclear weapons. They have helped ensure that a climate in which the use of nuclear weapons might seem legitimate could not arise. Just this afternoon I met with representatives of the United Nations Youth Association. Their South Australian president, Catriona Standfield, gave me a document making the case for nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament. It is a great credit to these young people. It reminds me of this expression: never doubt that a small group of committed and dedicated people can change the world—it is, in fact, the only thing that ever has.

It is important to understand that the friction between the nuclear haves and the nuclear have-nots is alive and well. Throughout the history of the nonproliferation treaty, the nuclear haves have stressed nonproliferation—that is, making sure that no other country gets nuclear weapons—while the nuclear have-nots have stressed disarmament—that is, obliging the nuclear armed countries to get rid of their bombs. Developing countries complain of double standards. They point out that all of the IAEA inspections are of the non-nuclear states and say, ‘We don’t see “disarmament agencies” being set up by the nuclear haves, the countries with nuclear weapons.’

Too often this difference of approach has led to international stalemate. Clearly, we need to have action on both fronts—nonproliferation and disarmament. That is where the comprehensive test ban treaty comes in. This treaty bans parties from carrying out any nuclear weapon test explosion or any other nuclear explosion and requires them to prohibit and prevent any nuclear explosions in their territory. It is both a practical step towards disarmament and an effective non-proliferation measure. This treaty is incredibly important in halting the momentum for nuclear proliferation and ultimately ringbarks the nuclear weapons tree.

In order for the treaty to come into effect it still needs to be ratified by the United States, China, India, Pakistan, North Korea, Indonesia, Egypt, Israel and Iran. That is a very tall order—small wonder it has not happened. The announcement by President Barack Obama that he supports ratification of the CTBT and will seek to have this treaty ratified by the Senate has given it new life and momentum. Its fate in the Senate is, however, uncertain and it is pretty apparent that prospects in the US could not withstand another unsuccessful attempt at Senate ratification. Therefore, President Obama is not expected to move on this until he is confident he has the numbers. The timing of this might not be helpful in terms of the forthcoming NPT Review Conference.

This need not reduce us all to impotent bystanders, wishing and hoping for the best from the Senate. Dr George Perkovich, from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, said in evidence to the parliament’s Joint Standing Committee on Treaties, which is carrying out a major inquiry into these issues, that friends of the CTBT should go to the countries whose ratification of the CTBT is needed and seek their agreement that, if the United States and China ratify the CTBT, they will do so as well—that these countries will not be the impediment to the comprehensive test ban treaty entering into force. His second suggestion was very specific for Australia—that we should say to the United States Senate that signing of the CTBT is not abandoning US allies and that we do not seek the protection of the US nuclear umbrella and would welcome a world without nuclear weapons. I support both of those proposals.

Borrowing a little from the late great Edward Kennedy, the dream of a world without nuclear weapons is a dream that must never die. We must never accept that it is alright to live in a world where some people have the power to kill tens of millions of their fellow human beings and make the planet uninhabitable in a heartbeat. This must never be acceptable. I congratulate the member for Fremantle on bringing this motion before the House. It is very timely. I also commend the other members of the treaties committee who are contributing to this debate.

This is an issue whose time has come. We have the NPT Review Conference scheduled for next year. We need to re-energise the debate on both nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament. Given the shot in the arm, the stimulus, given to it by President Barack Obama in Prague earlier this year, this is the time for action to be taken.