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Presentation Notes: Launch of IPAN Inquiry Report at Parliament, Canberra 24 November 2022

Yumalundi. I begin today by acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we meet today, and pay my respects to their Elders past and present.

I also wish to acknowledge:

- the Aboriginal people who died or have and continue to suffer from the nuclear tests in outback Australia between 1953 and 1963, and to their land, sea, communities, physical bodies and customs all deeply affected;
- that the land beneath Pine Gap is not US territory and stands on the traditional land of the Arrernte people of central Australia. The original owners and custodians were never asked to cede this land – now a strategic nuclear target - and have never been compensated for its use;
- the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Island people who have marched with and campaigned alongside peace activists for many decades. I hope that an Indigenous Voice to Parliament will result in Aboriginal people determining the fate of military installations and objectives on their sacred land and seas. I certainly don't want to place any burden on Aboriginal people but no one possesses the cultural and spiritual connection that they have to this country and so it must be preserved. We simply cannot have US bombers and nuclear armed submarines threatening other people of the world, or military installations that facilitate the death of people in countries with whom we are not at war, all based on their ancestral lands and seas. Nor should they tolerate space ports being used by Defence that will ultimately lead to hostile dreamtime skies.

I feel very fortunate to be here today to bear witness to the massive effort - including the work of Annette, Jonathon, Maya, Ross, Kathryn, Bernadette, many community and peace organisations, trade unions, panellists, contributors and many important others listed on page 6 of the report - finally materialising in the public **launch of the IPAN People's Inquiry Report 'Charting our own course: Next steps towards an Independent and Peaceful Australia'**.

All advancements of importance are initially made by a small minority and gradually spread, usually from the ground up. At a time when tensions are high and headlines fire up bellicose politicians and pundits it is comforting to be surrounded by people of grace and good sense determined to lead the world away from war.

That's particularly important to me. I have two young children. Eager young boys with their lives ahead of them and life blazing out of every aspect of their being: no-one needs to be told they'd rather be alive and happy than living in a war zone, perhaps injured or dead. And so it's difficult for me to accept that a condition upon which their lives depend is reliance on foolish old men not pushing nuclear buttons, whether as a pre-emptive or first strike, or in retaliation, or worse, in error. No man or country should even possess the power to end all human life, including the lives of my children and of every other child on Earth, and no person should have to live in fear of that happening. This dangerous game of chicken must end. The powerplay must stop and the confrontations must die down. The Australian Government must regain its sanity, stop regarding US geopolitical supremacy as a law of nature and follow an international path directed towards respect between nations and the common good of humankind everywhere.

You are the people of our time who understand that agreement and diplomacy is better than war. You are the people who understand that there is no victory in war. And you are the people who understand that the humanity that we share determines and should control our real interests as people, interests we share with all people of the world, whether of the east or of the west.

I recently received an email encouraging me to read the book '*Sub-imperial Power: Australia in the International Arena*' by Clinton Fernandes, author and Professor of International and Political Studies at UNSW. I did read it, and these lines struck me as the most important in the book:

'The public responds rationally to the facts it sees. Inconvenient facts are not censored but are buried all the same, in principle, they are discoverable but in reality they are out of the public's awareness because, without regular repetition, no one remembers them. And they have to remain unrepeatable and unemphasised precisely because of Australia's democratic freedoms. If they are front and centre, they would never be tolerated by Australians. This is why a former DFAT Secretary said, 'We cannot allow foreign policy to be made in the streets, by media or by unions.'

This is precisely why this report is of such value and historical importance. Offering alternative visions and possible solutions. The release of the report itself may not make resisters, critics and hard-liners in Canberra nervous, but the public adoption and repetition of its ideas will.

It is not fanatical for people to want a say in Defence and foreign policy matters, or to want a choice that excludes war and maintains our sovereignty, or for people to want public scrutiny and accountability of the decisions made in our name. And the sooner we start calling for those things, the sooner time will persuade the decision makers.

To the media, who have form in driving us towards war because it's good for newspapers and some of their financial supporters and coincidentally might serve the interests of media proprietors, I would point out that the President of the United States has not ruled out the use of nuclear weapons - even as a first strike - in order to defend Taiwan or in any conflict with China. In fact, the President said only last month that the risk of nuclear "Armageddon" is the highest it has been for 60 years. Now look back to Hiroshima: there are no promotions or profits or Walkley Awards after a nuclear exchange. With Armageddon there are no newspapers, no internet and no journalists, only burning cities, radiation poisoning, smoke, social chaos, rotting corpses and utter desolation and ghastliness. So, the time has come for you to read, digest, quote from and cite this report. Ask the Australian Government, how many people will die in the event of a nuclear war in our region? Which of our cities are likely targets? What will be the fall-out zones? How is a large-scale war in this region in our national interests? How does and will war affect the climate? Where is this all going? There are Walkley Awards and viral accolades for the honest and forthright: those who make politicians confront the history of all countries and provide context, who seek evidence, understanding and fact check, and who call out the hypocrisy of politicians who ignore the crimes of some leaders and countries and denounce the crimes of others.

To the Australian Government that stubbornly clings to and relies on the US nuclear deterrence umbrella I say, tell people the truth. Tell people that nuclear deterrence is only a theory; tell people that the risks of war have increased notwithstanding the existence of nuclear weapons; and tell people nuclear deterrence requires more than nuclear threats. As the Rand Corporation pointed out in 2018,

effective deterrence also requires dialogue, inducements and reassurances in a larger strategy of dissuasion, which does not currently exist.

Irrespective of how this report is received by those in power it will have an impact there if it is read and taken up by ordinary people who recognise its truths and the personal vulnerability of all people, including themselves and their loved ones and all Australians, to the depredations of international political game-playing and the wanton destructiveness of unnecessary war. With the support of enough ordinary Australians, like us, even if only at the polling booths, our ideals can and will be achieved.

And again, finally, I thank all contributors for their labours for and assistance in the inquiry and in this report. I hope and pray that your combined efforts and the good sense of the ordinary person will enable sanity, humanity and peace to prevail.