

International Congress on Neutrality – a Strategy for Global Stabilisation- Bogota, Colombia-4-7th April,2024

Presentation by Bevan Ramsden on behalf of the Independent and Peaceful Australia Network (IPAN)

Sisters and Brothers in pursuit of peace and justice, Comrades,

I thank the organisers of this international congress for providing myself, as a delegate from Australia representing the Independent and Peaceful Australia Network (IPAN), this opportunity to support the aims of this congress and to provide an insight into the serious situation which we in Australia are facing.

IPAN works at grass roots level and consists of peace groups, trade unions and faith organisations, across Australia, as well as numerous individuals and campaigns for an independent foreign policy for Australia which will deliver peace and mutually beneficial relations with all countries.

IPAN applauds the holding of this International Congress on Neutrality and strongly supports the Colombian call for the world to unite for neutrality and peace and promote a strategy to stabilise our planet and build a future where war is a relic of the past. Our world is facing a series of crises. Current wars are causing extensive suffering. Civilians in Gaza face genocide. Nations are lining up in blocks in preparation for even more extensive conflict. The danger of nuclear escalation is ever present. And environmentally, we are heading with increasing speed towards a catastrophic outcome.

So this congress is being held at a critical time and the place chosen to hold it is most appropriate as Colombia has a progressive government searching for a peaceful and sustainable future for Colombia and the world.

We in Australia are facing a serious crisis.

We are caught in a cleft position between the Super Powers, the USA and China.

Neutrality and the non-aligned movement may provide us the only pathway out of this crisis; the only way that we can be guaranteed a future of peace and mutually beneficial relations with all countries.

I should explain the situation we are facing in detail.

China is Australia's major trading partner. Mineral exports to China have provided many jobs and significant export income for Australia. Australians depend on importation from China for many everyday items. Prosperity for Australians over recent decades has depended to a significant extent on trade with China.

On the other hand, Australian political leadership is slavishly bonded to US foreign policy through the ANZUS Alliance and more recently the AUKUS war pact between the UK, the USA and Australia. Internally, this subservience to the United States is expressed through the sell out of sovereignty through an agreement signed between the US and Australian

governments called the Force Posture Agreement. It guarantees the United States a military posture in Australia. In fact it gives the United States military unimpeded access to our airfields and sea ports. That includes porting of their nuclear submarines and stationing of their B52 bombers, some of which can carry nuclear weapons. It facilitates the stationing of 2,500 US marines each year in our northern Territory and the staging of military exercises with our Defence forces practicing for war against China. The United States has established its own Command Centres in Australia's northern capital of Darwin, for its airforce and US marines.

Australian governments in the 1960's and early 70's allowed the United States to set up military bases in Australia such as the Pine Gap satellite reception base in central Australia. It downloads from US spy satellites to provide vital intelligence to the US military especially in times of war and for use in its nuclear weapons operations. Currently, we believe Pine Gap is forwarding such intelligence to the Israeli military.

The VLF radio station built by the US in north west Australia communicates by radio with their submerged nuclear submarines and can provide the trigger signal for these submarines to launch their nuclear payload.

In slavishly following United States foreign policy, the Australian leadership automatically supports the United States' hostile attitude towards China. It means the Australia's navy are conducting provocative patrols through the South China Sea and Taiwanese Straits in accordance with United States policy to ensure so called "freedom of navigation". Such naval operations are totally unnecessary as China has never indicated any intention of interfering with commercial shipping; indeed its dependence on such freedom of navigation is vital for its own economy.

The Australian Peace Movement and that includes IPAN, the Independent and Peaceful Australia Network, is deeply concerned about Australia's leaders' slavish adherence to United States in foreign policy and the close integration of the Australian military with that of the US. That integration includes at personnel level, armament purchases, training exercises, purchase of US nuclear submarines, joint hypersonic missile development and naval patrols in the South China Sea. Such is this close integration and inter-dependence that involvement in US wars would appear to be automatic.

IPAN sees these agreements as a sell out of Australia's sovereignty and furthermore it has been done behind the backs of the people and parliament. Both have had no say or opportunity to discuss, let alone oppose, these Agreements and war pact with the USA and the UK. The proposed acquisition of nuclear-propelled submarines, at the huge cost of \$368 Billion, has been subject to no democratic discussion or decision-making. And this public expenditure means a huge loss to addressing affordable housing, climate change and other pressing social needs.

Australia's support for a US war against China would be disastrous for the Australian community and for people of our region, if not the world. Trade with China would cease and other supplies by ships disrupted, resulting in scarcity or lack of every-day items, severe job losses and in the short term general wrecking of the economy. Key US military bases such as

Pine Gap and the North- West Harold Holt Submarine Communication base could be subject to missile attack, if a full -scale war erupted. And the dark cloud, of possible escalation into nuclear war, hangs over such hostilities. So understandably, Australian Peace Organisations are campaigning against AUKUS, the acquisition of nuclear attack submarines, the Force Posture Agreement and US military bases on our soil, with the aim of keeping Australia out of such a war.

The huge disconnect between the position of Australia's political leaders, and that includes both the major political parties, is highlighted by two separate opinion polls of the attitude of the Australian people towards war.

The question was asked: "In the event of a war between the USA and China, would you prefer that Australia side with China, side with the USA or stay neutral and keep out of such a war?"

Two thirds of Australians, 67%, favour **neutrality** and **keeping out of a such a war**.

Among Australian women the preference for neutrality was 73%.

So there is a huge gulf between what Australians want and what successive governments of both major political parties, have committed and are committing Australia to, militarily.

IPAN had identified this deep concern for peace and an independent foreign policy through their National Inquiry into the costs and consequences of Australia's involvement in US wars and the alternatives. The Inquiry attracted 283 contributions from all parts of Australia and all walks of life. Its conclusions, summed up in IPAN's Inquiry Report, showed concern that the close alliance with the United States is drawing Australia into wars which are morally reprehensible and which have no relation to defence of Australia and everything to do with supporting aggressive US foreign policy. The Inquiry Report concluded that we need to keep out of such wars, distancing ourselves from United States foreign policy and charting our own course for peace and mutually beneficial relations with all countries.

As another outcome of this People's Inquiry, IPAN began research and discussion into an alternative defence policy for an independent Australia. In 2023, these ideas, on alternative defence, were formulated into an "IPAN Vision for an system of Alternative Defence" and the concept of "Armed Neutrality" is central to this vision.

IPAN in its vision for an alternative defence policy says, I quote:

"IPAN campaigns for an independent Australia that promotes peaceful and mutually beneficial relations with all countries. A truly independent Australia would seek to resolve hostilities and differences between countries in our region by peaceful diplomatic means. It would embrace a policy based on the principle of "non-nuclear Armed Neutrality". Importantly, it would place primary reliance on the critical tools of diplomacy to foresee and resolve international differences and to develop positive and peaceful relations with all

countries based on equality and mutual respect. Non-alignment could be a step towards neutrality.

'Neutrality' means that Australia would have no involvement in any wars between other countries. It would prevent Australian territory being used in such wars. This necessarily means ending foreign military bases on our soil." End of quote.

Independence and neutrality as a national policy requires implementation of all the necessary measures to defend the country's independent neutrality policy. This means appropriate defence of national territory and in the case of island Australia, its approach waters. In Australia's case this also means redeveloping manufacturing industry and putting strategic industries under public ownership and control. This is necessary to support a self-reliant, self defence force and to ensure the nation can withstand economic pressure and possible shipping blockades from a hostile power.

Summing up, joining the fraternity of non-aligned nations and embracing neutrality would free Australia from involvement in a US war against China and enable the pursuit of an independent foreign policy embracing peaceful and mutually beneficial relations with all countries.