



## International Christian Peace Movement

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### **Pax Christi Australia Submission to the People's Inquiry Exploring the Case for an Independent and Peaceful Australia**

**Pax Christi Australia** is a branch of Pax Christi International, the International Christian Peace Movement. Pax Christ International has consultative status at the United Nations Human Rights Council..

If we are to achieve an Independent and Peaceful Australia we must re-examine who we are and from where we come. We are part of the ANZUS and other alliances because that is where Australia as a nation has chosen and continues to choose to be. Our alliances are an expression of who we believe ourselves to be and where we stand among the nations of the world. To question the costs of our alliances is to challenge our identity and who we choose to be. We must understand why this is so and how it comes to be. We must redefine what we mean by "Security" and "Defence." We contend that security cannot be found in military alliances and participation in the arms race. We also contend that we do not need to create enemies against whom we need to defend ourselves.

Australia, as we know it was founded on war and violence. The British Empire invaded and seized the land and fought wars with the First Nations peoples. They were driven from the land, their way of life was undermined and their spirituality was destroyed. They were marginalised and neglected as being less than fully human. The foundations of the Commonwealth of Australia are both physical and spiritual violence. Australians live in fear that what they stole violently could be taken from them violently.

Australians also fear finding themselves to be the one of only two white nations in the Asia Pacific region. British/European exceptionalism regarded people of colour as inferior if not sub human. The coming together of the states in the Federation was based on the urgency of preserving a white Australia. This was enshrined in one of the first acts of the Federal Parliament. White Australia was the motivation for Australian participation in the First World War and in the subsequent Versailles Peace Settlement. Australia was now a military nation as part of the British Imperial Force. When dependence on Britain collapsed in World War 2, Australia looked to US support to maintain white Australia and Western dominance of the Asia Pacific. Our perception of the need to "defend freedom" led to our

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participation in further wars to resist both national independence movements and Marxist nationalism in the Asia Pacific region.

If we are to move to an Independent and Peaceful Australia we must redefine what we mean by "Security" and "Defence." Is security to be found in military alliances and taking part in the arms race? Are we creating enemies against whom we need to defend ourselves?

We are inspired by Pope Francis' call to move from Just War to Just Peace. In his encyclical "Fratelli Tutti" he asserts that: *Every war leaves our world worse than it was before. We can no longer think of war as a solution because its risks are now greater than its supposed benefits. Just War theory no longer applies. Never again War! (258-261). Nuclear deterrence in the twenty-first century, far from providing security, increases fear and undermines relationships of trust between nations. The total elimination of nuclear weapons becomes a humanitarian imperative. The money allocated to weapons and other military expenditures, would be better spent on establishing a global fund that can put an end to hunger and boost development in the most impoverished countries, so that their citizens will not resort to violent solutions, or have to leave their countries in order to seek a more dignified life.*

Professor Heather Eaton at the 2019 Earth@Peace conference in Melbourne in 2019, asserted that *Humanity is at a Spiritual Crossroads. We are caught up in a culture of domination and violence which sees life as a series of fights, with increasing militarism, increasing violence by men towards women and increasing environmental degradation.* She invites us to *build a culture of nonviolence and active resistance, to construct cultural programmes which have the power to transform violence and to perceive the natural world as a larger sacred community of which we are part.*

Pope Francis and Professor Eaton invite us to know ourselves as a people dedicated to the building of peace and justice and the sharing of resources in our region, seeking non violent solutions and dialogue in situations of conflict and refusing to align with imperial systems of any description. We need to challenge the perception that violent conflict is inevitable so that we are free to redirect resources towards peace making. We need to educate people to see that there is an alternative to military alliances and participation in the arms industry. However, this means that we need to specifically identify non violent strategies to promote peace in our region and to deal with the issues underlying conflict. We must promote non violence as a viable alternative and work out the implications of non violent resistance to the imperial domination of our region.

In investigating the costs of our alliances we need to demonstrate the costs of not disengaging to embrace a nonviolence strategy. This includes the costs of depriving the nations of the region of development opportunities and of making inroads in the war on poverty and injustice. It includes an appreciation of the costs of possible conflicts arising from competition for scarce resources, the effects of climate change, and of imperial powers' exploitation of these conflicts.

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What are the costs and consequences of our alliances, what alternatives might be available? The exploitation of scarce resources, exacerbated by climate change, increases the possibility of conflicts. Instead of assisting the development of smaller, younger nations, weapons and military manufacturing companies see marketing opportunities.

There are consequences to being in alliances. One cost that stands out is that of preparing for possible conflicts that do not take place:

- Military spending diverts resources away from solving environmental problems and away from sustainable development.
- Resource extraction used to finance conflicts leads to environmental damage and degradation.
- Military spending diverts resources away from welfare needs of people such as education, health, food security, housing, etc.
- Military training creates emissions, disruption to landscapes and terrestrial and marine habitats as well as creating chemical and noise pollution from the use of weapons, aircraft and vehicles.
- Military training and joint exercises with alliance partners result in the destruction of Indigenous lands.
- Military spending is out of proportion to the amount we spend on preserving our biodiversity, e.g., the billions we will spend on each new submarine in contrast to the paltry millions on biodiversity.
- Military training and joint exercises can lead to suspicion among countries that are not part of our alliances and threaten the peace.

We have always spent more on arms than on aid. This diversion of resources comes at the cost of not only our own population and a groaning earth, but now there are significant reductions in aid we provide to our near neighbours.

Climate Change is an area of deep concern for many of our youth who will bear the burden of the future cost of our lack of action now. We are remiss if we do not hear their call for change. Therefore, it is a call to change the way we have been doing business with our allies and the way we use our resources.

As a faith based organisation Pax Christi works towards maximising the ways of working together with other nations to honour and safeguard dignity, develop respect, nurture dialogue and work cooperatively for a nonviolent and peaceful future for all.

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