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Submission to IPAN.

This submission seeks to question the role of Australian parliamentarians in determining national foreign policy and war powers.

I have based it on my experience as a senator 1983-1999 at a time when it seems there was a more direct involvement of parliamentarians in foreign policy debate and commitment to Australia's role within the international peace movement. Of course I was fortunate to enter the parliament at a time when well-known peace activists like Tom Uren, Senator Ruth Coleman and Senator George Georges were determined to influence the direction of the new Hawke Government's foreign policy. Furthermore, during this period Western Australians elected Senator Jo Valentine, (People for Nuclear Disarmament Party), Senators Christabel Chamarette and Dee Margetts (Greens Party), who brought to the Australian Parliament strong voices for a more independent and peaceful Australia. This in turn resonated with a number of Labor and Democrat parliamentarians so together we were able to present alternative views about Australian foreign policy and particularly its potential for peace building and social justice.

When I decided to hold the inaugural meeting of the anti-conscription organisation "Save Our Sons" at our home in Townsville in 1966 I could not have predicted the path I would take as a peace activist in the community as well as in the Australian Parliament.

My introduction to political activism in remote North Queensland in the 1960s put me on a very steep learning curve. I learned that women were defined by their husband's career, and it was unacceptable for a young married woman to speak out in public debate. However I began to read about foreign policy and national politics and, most importantly, joined the Townsville Peace Movement. This introduced me to the Australian Labor Party and the trade union movement, both of which gave me opportunities to engage in peace activism throughout my political career.

By 1972 I was celebrating the election of a Labor Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam who announced that Australian troops were to be withdrawn from Vietnam and an end to conscription. I continued working within the peace movement during the 1970s when its focus was the presence of U.S military bases in Australia. Working with People for Nuclear Disarmament we opposed visits of nuclear war ships and American B52 bombers and campaigned against uranium mining. I was elected to the Townsville City Council in 1979 and we declared the city nuclear free, raising the ire of the French owned mining company, Minatome, which was exploring for uranium in nearby Charters Towers. These activities were closely scrutinised by Queensland Special Branch and no doubt information was also passed on to the Australian Secret Intelligence Office.

In 1983 I was elected to the Australian Senate where I was introduced to Women's International League for Peace and Freedom by a colleague Senator Pat Giles from Western Australia. Since 1984 I have remained a member of WILPF Queensland and more recently WILPF Tasmania.

In 1984, Labor women parliamentarians supported the Women's Peace Camp set up outside Old Parliament House in Canberra. Women were protesting against the influence of American defence policy on Australia and particularly the joint secret military activities at Pine Gap. We invited these protestors into Parliament House to have hot showers and warm food, despite some of the vocal criticism of certain colleagues!

At the end of that year my family was travelling to the United Kingdom, where I had planned to visit the women peace activists camped at Greenham Common adjacent to the Berkshire military base. They

were protesting the launch of Cruise Missiles .The women from the Pine Gap Camp had organised for me to take an Australian Peace Cake in solidarity with the women of Greenham Common. It was large fruit cake ,well wrapped and carried in my hand luggage . When I finally took it to be cut as we sat around the fire at the Women's Peace Camp, I discovered that several handwritten peace messages had been included, wrapped in alfoil they had survived the journey from the Central Australian desert to the snowclad English forest ! Fortunately, my travel preceded electronic scrutiny of hand luggage, so I didn't have to answer any awkward questions about the secret greetings hidden inside the Peace Cake !

As a parliamentarian for sixteen years, I was able to participate in a range of foreign policy debates that focussed on peacebuilding . During the years I was in government , the Labor Government appointed the first Minister for Disarmament and played a major role negotiating for the development of an International Chemical Weapons Convention. I joined some of my colleagues in campaigning against Australia's involvement in the US MX Missile Defence Program, and Australia's promotion of a Nuclear Free Pacific. In 1989 as Minister for the Status of Women in the Hawke Labor Government I welcomed 300 delegates to Sydney where they were attending WILPF's International Congress: Women: Building a Common and Secure Future.

In 1991 when the Prime Minister , Bob Hawke committed Australia to the U.S led Gulf War, I was one of nine government representatives who opposed this decision, releasing a public statement urging the United Nations to focus on the withdrawal of Iraqi troops from Kuwait and advocating demilitarisation of the Middle East.

In the 1990s I represented Australia in an international peace organisation , "Parliamentarians for Global Action," which worked for a nuclear test ban, ,non-proliferation and United Nations peace keeping We promoted an active role for women in leading conflict resolution talks between nations, urging then U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan to send a Women's Peace Delegation to Iraq. Sadly, it didn't happen, but the following Iraq and Afghanistan wars continued to demonstrate that male led wars fail to resolve international conflict .

In 1998 a number of Australian parliamentarians tried to prevent a major arms exhibition , AIDEX, being held in Canberra . Unfortunately, we were unsuccessful and one of the legacies of that event is an Australian based arms industry which has a very cosy relationship with national government departments as well as offering considerable largesse to the Australian War Memorial ..

Anecdotally I have heard that current parliamentarians, whether in government or opposition, are unable to ask foreign policy questions unless they are first approved by the Foreign Minister. This is very much a new development as many of us in the past were active in using Senate Question Time to raise concern about specific peace ,security and human rights issues .On occasions it was also possible to successfully steer more controversial resolutions through the Senate and a number of these were of lasting significance.

In 1996, Senator John Woodley (Democrat) and I moved that the Senate initiate a Code of Race Ethics to end racial debate in the parliament that was so offensive to indigenous Australian and Australians with Asian heritage . It was passed unanimously and led to a specific "Federal Parliamentarians Code of Race Ethics -A contribution towards a more tolerant Australia " In 1998 when the new parliament was elected 122 Members and Senators had signed this code- just 55% of elected representatives .

On March 4th 1998 I moved a resolution already adopted by the European Parliament calling on the Israeli Government to free kidnapped nuclear technician , Mordechai Vanunu and this was carried by the Australian Senate. He subsequently obtained his freedom and sanctuary in Norway in 2004.

Australia has recently been shamed by revelations of war crimes committed by some of our soldiers in Afghanistan in the last decade. The debate that has erupted demands community discussion about the

responsibility of soldiers, their military leaders and governments which send Australians into war zones .Yet such a significant debate does not appear to have been prominent in the Australian Parliament

As a nation we have a history of being one of the first countries to volunteer our troops for wars that are distant from Australia ,and among people whose cultures we do not understand . Why do we believe we are so essential in fighting other nations wars ? When will we become independent and commit only to defending our own country , peace keeping and humanitarian roles? When will we insist that any decision that Australia be involved in further overseas war first be debated and voted for in the national parliament ? Australia is proud of its history of war fare yet the frontier wars with Australia's indigenous peoples is the one area of conflict that successive political leaders have refused to acknowledge .

As we approach a Federal Election, it is refreshing for many Australians to have the opportunity to contribute to this Peoples Inquiry Exploring the Case for an Independent and Peaceful Australia .I hope that Australians concerned about our international role will actively support those parliamentarians and candidates who are prepared to voice their commitment to peace and a more independent foreign policy.

I am sure there must be a number of current parliamentarians concerned about the direction of some areas of Australian foreign policy debate , but why are they so silent.? Few voices are heard as the Australian Government seeks to exert more control over individuals and organisations in the name of national security .It seems even the official Opposition has become cautious when questioning foreign and defence policy . The fact that a public servant can publicly announcing a statement about the 'drums of war ' suggests it is long overdue that parliamentarians reasserted themselves into greater prominence in foreign policy debate.

Only Tasmanian parliamentarian and antiwar whistle-blower Andrew Wilkie (Independent) seems to be a continuing voice of reason in questioning aspects of government policy. As recently as May 2021 he spoke against indefinite arbitrary detention when debating the Migration Amendment (Clarifying International Obligations for Removal) Bill 2021 arguing that the legislation was " an unreasonable extension of the power of the state " He also reminded us that he "disagreed with the whole notion of disrespecting the rulings and intent of the Federal Court".

Clearly it has become increasingly urgent that more Australian parliamentarians are elected to demonstrate their commitment to the fundamentals of our democracy working for a more independent and peaceful Australia .

Therefore, I would recommend that IPAN

- Actively promote the outcome of the Peoples Inquiry widely in marginal seats in the forthcoming Federal Election
- Initiate a comprehensive research survey ,which details the involvement of elected Members and Senators in foreign policy debate 1983--2021 to enable an assessment of how parliamentarians are able to fulfil their roles as guardians of Australia's international role in peacebuilding and security .

Margaret Reynolds.