

# **Resistance, Resilience, and Respect for Human Rights**

## ***CHinemma', Nina'maolek, yan Inarespetu para Direchon Taotao'***

Guahan, September 14-19, 2009

### **COUNTRY REPORT AUSTRALIA**

My name is Hannah Middleton and I am a member of the Australian Anti-Bases Campaign Coalition, the largest peace coalition in Australia.

I bring greetings from peace activists around Australia to this important conference.

Many of us have recently returned to our homes after taking part in a Peace Convergence opposing joint Australian-United States military exercises named Talisman Sabre.

The issues raised by the Peace Convergence reflect the major elements of the struggle against militarisation in our country:

- our military relationship with the US ;what constitutes security; indigenous rights; military spending; environmental protection; conversion; finding non-violent solutions to problems

#### **CONTEXT**

Australia is an industrialised, developed country in the Asia-Pacific region and our trade, political and security interests are inevitably tied up with our neighbours in this region.

During the 13 years of the Howard Government Australia became a front line collaborator with the Bush administration's US global war plans, providing specialist military forces and a secure base for US electronic and satellite spying activities. More US bases were set up, inter-operability with the US military was developed and massive joint military exercises were held every second year.

The new Labor Government, elected in late 2007, is continuing these policies and says that Australia's alliance with the United States is "fundamental and indispensable" to the country's foreign policy.'

Successive Australian governments have assisted the US in its efforts to weaponise space and to dominate Earth from space in a space missile program which is providing super profits for the armaments corporations including Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Raytheon and TRW.

Australia hosts 10 US military facilities including Pine Gap, one of the largest and most important US war fighting and intelligence bases in the world. It is ground station which controls satellites which span a strategically important third of the globe, covering China, southern Russia and the Middle East oil fields.

In May 2009 the Rudd Government released its Defence White Paper (DWP), announcing the largest military build-up in Australia since World War 2 with a massive increase in sea and air power.

Australia's military spending steals the resources needed to provide human and social needs and to stimulate the economy in the face of the deepening economic recession.

This has been recognised by the Australian people. Opinion polls in 2008 showed that 70 per cent of the community opposed increased spending on the military.

The Bush administration's efforts to contain China had three broad objectives: to convert existing relations with Japan, Australia, and South Korea into an integrated anti-Chinese alliance; to bring other nations, especially India, into this system; and to expand US military capabilities in the Asia-Pacific region.

Australia plays a dominant role economically and politically in relation to many of the smaller Pacific island states. Australian soldiers, police and/or civil servants are in a number of islands, including East Timor, the Solomons and Tonga. In East Timor Australia organised the coup which destroyed the Fretilin Government.

This is a brief outline of the situation in which the struggle against the increasing militarisation of our society is fought by peace activists. Around our large continent there are many campaigns against militarisation. Below are some of the major ones during the last two years. They are listed in alphabetical order, not order of importance.

## ARMS FAIRS

An arms fair — the Asia-Pacific Defence and Security Exhibition (APDSE) — was due to open in November 2008.

Networking around the country, we reached agreement on protests to be held, including non-violent direct action to prevent the arms bazaar taking place

In a statement we said:

*"In 2007, US\$ 1,339 billion was used on military spending — the equivalent of 600 years of the UN's budget. Australia's military spending is over AUD\$ 62 million per day. These extraordinary expenditures on war and preparations for war divert the financial, human, technological and natural resources needed to resolve our real threats, such as poverty, hunger, climate change, and environmental degradation.*

*"Rather than addressing these threats, weapons and wars aggravate them. War displaces millions of people, consumes vast resources and destroys our environment.*

*"APDSE will not promote "Defence and Security", but rather corporate profit at the expense of security. "*

We were really delighted that APDSE was cancelled.

## CONVERSION

We have been working on conversion, especially with activists in South Australia which is called "the defence state" and which is using military contracts to try to overcome the economic crisis.

At this stage we are developing information materials about using science for life-enhancement rather than death and arguing for the creation of new "green" jobs to replace those in military industries. An International Labor Organisation study showed that as many as four times the number of jobs that are created by the defence budget would be created if the money was spent on more productive schemes.

We have argued that imaginative programs of arms conversion should be introduced, using many of the skills and resources at present tied up in military industry to create new jobs and produce socially useful and environmentally friendly products.

Savings from arms expenditure would be transferred into a common security program that can be invested in combating global warming and resource depletion, prioritising environmental and

economic security, especially through renewable energy programs that reduce carbon emissions and increase security of supply.

## DEFENCE WHITE PAPER

In 2008 the government announced that it would release a major policy document – a Defence White Paper – and that it would first hold a public consultation.

My own peace group launched a major campaign to get as many submissions to the government as possible from peace and environment groups, women's and migrant organisations, trade unions and other bodies. We sent out a template which could be sent in as a submission and encouraged individuals and organisations to sign it and send it in, often with their own changes and additions.

We encouraged and supported peace activists around the country to attend the consultation public meetings and in many centres they gave evidence and argued a strong case.

We also sent in a substantial submission of our own in which we argued:

*“Australia should abandon its current aggressive “defence” philosophy; the use of military strength for economic leverage; the pursuit of advanced technology with reliance on the United States for systems and logistics support; the increasing militarisation of our society; and promotion of the arms trade. This path consumes scarce public resources, undermines security and provokes conflict.*

*“Instead, we should rethink what we mean by security, develop different relationships with regional states, reassess the weapons systems required to satisfy our security interests, develop conversion programs, acknowledge and support indigenous rights and increase aid to our Asia-Pacific neighbours.....”*

*“The new approach should include breaking the US alliance, removing the US military bases from our soil, and developing confidence building processes in our region. Foreign warships and military aircraft should no longer call at Australian ports and airfields or transit through Australian territorial space.”*

## IRAQ and AFGHANISTAN

There have been broad committees around the country working hard on the campaign to get Australian troops out of Iraq and to see an end to that US invasion and occupation. There have been endless street marches, public meetings and seminars, lobbying politicians, writing to newspapers and so on.

We had some success. The new Australian Government has brought almost all our troops home from Iraq.

At the same time, however, it is increasing its involvement in the war in Afghanistan, sending more troops and buying unmanned planes – the drones that are causing so many civilian casualties in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Protests against this war are slowly gathering pace in Australia.

## NUCLEAR ISSUES

There has been an upsurge of activity in the campaign against nuclear weapons. Efforts to prevent uranium mining and export have increased; the committees which organise the annual events to commemorate the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have been active, and there has been wide support for activities organised by the anti-nuclear coalition ICAN.

Central features of these campaigns have been that:

- a) The Australian Government should work for a treaty which would prohibit the development, production, testing, deployment, stockpiling, transfer, threat and use of nuclear weapons, pressure the existing nuclear weapons states to immediately stop upgrading, modernising and testing new nuclear weapons, demand that all nuclear weapons be taken off high alert, and insist that every nuclear weapon state pledge never to use nuclear weapons first.
- b) The Australian Government should work for the establishment of nuclear-free zones, in particular Northeast Asian (including de-nuclearisation of the Korean peninsula) and Southeast Asian nuclear-free zones.

## REGIONAL SOLIDARITY

In 2007 two Australian peace activists attended the world meeting of anti-bases campaigners held in Quito, Ecuador which brought together some 400 activists from 40 countries.

According to US Government figures, the US military maintains 737 bases in 130 countries, although many estimate the true number to be over 1,000. Foreign military bases are instruments of war. They are used to secure the interests of a few at the cost of democracy, justice, sovereignty and self determination. Our concerns range from the destruction of the environment, confiscation of farmlands, abuse of women, violation of human rights; oppression of local communities, particularly indigenous peoples, repression of local struggles, control of resources and broader concerns about military and economic domination.

The conference set up the Global Network against Foreign Military Bases. From Australia we made a commitment to try to develop solidarity with Pacific peoples fighting militarisation.

To fulfil that promise in 2007 we brought Terri Keko'olani and Leimaile Quitevis from Kapai 'Aina (Hawai'i) to Australia to join us at the protests against the Talisman Sabre war games and to speak at many meetings to inform people about their struggle. We thank them again for all they brought to us.

In 2008 I was able to win a scholarship from the Society of Friends (Quakers) which we used to fund a speaking tour by Lisa Natividad and Julian Aguon from Guahan. This had a strong impact in many communities and we thank them again for all their patience and hard work during that visit.

Following the visit we launched a campaign of letters to go to the Australian Government demanding

We also organised a campaign of letters from a wide range of organisations, demanding that the Australian Government:

- ensure that Australian firms are strongly discouraged from bidding for and taking up contracts for any aspect of the new military expansion on Guahan.
- ensure that United States military assets from Guahan are not accorded access to Australian facilities for training or exercises.
- support the decolonisation of Guahan.

## SPACE WARFARE

I am the Australian representative on the board of the Global Network against Weapons and Nuclear Power in Space and my peace group always tries to send a delegate to their annual meeting.

삭제됨: <sp><sp>

In 2007 we attended in Darmstadt, Germany, in 2008 in Omaha, USA and this year in Seoul, Korea.

In Korea we visited the 400 year old farming village of Mugeon-ri. The farmers are fighting the expansion of a US military training base. The farmers say the expansion threatens their livelihoods but also peace on the Korean peninsula and in the Asia-Pacific region.

On our return to Australia, we launched a letter writing campaign, asking peace groups to send urgent protests to the South Korean Government

We also staged a vigil outside the Korean Consulate in Sydney.

## WAR GAMES

Military exercises play a part in the US military transformation in the Pacific.

Australia and the US have agreed to develop a Joint Combined Training Centre. Three training facilities are being developed at the cost of tens of millions of dollars. They will be inter-linked through a node in the Pacific War Fighting Centre in Hawai'i. Military exercises using the three bases will be directed and monitored by the US military's Pacific Command (PacCom) in Hawai'i.

In 1997 eight people contested the war games. In 2005 it was 80 and in 2007 it rose to about 500. This year (2009) the numbers fell to under 100.

In a powerful array of non-violent actions over three days, Peace Convergence campaigners blockaded, spoke, danced, staged vigils, sang, climbed fences, hung banners, and defied police and the military.

They entered Darumbal Aboriginal land with permission from the traditional owners.

Some groups of activists entered the military training area on several occasions to further disrupt the live firing exercise. Jess reported that after her group had spent a day and night in the area, they were found by US soldiers.

They started to read out the names of people who had died in Afghanistan, civilians and soldiers. "As we continued to pray and remember," she said, "we were completely unprepared for what came next. Gently one of the US soldiers offered us the name of his friend. Our refrain was said through sobs as we shared in grief together."

***At times the resources of the military around the world seem overwhelming. However, there is no need for despondency for the world's other superpower, the peace movement, is very much alive and well!***

My name is Sue Gilbey and I would like to add a little to Hannah's excellent report. While Australia has a focus both economically and strategically on offence as opposed to defence the situation at home remains sadly lacking. Refugees, often from countries where our military are engaged are still detained, but under our current government this happens off shore, cleverly preventing the sorts of support the Australian people were offering previously when detention centres were operating locally. Australia remains the only developed country without either a bill of rights for all citizens or a treaty with its Indigenous populations.

For those same first Australians the situation is a disgrace. Two years ago the military enforced a process locally known as the Intervention, necessitating the suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act introducing a controlled food voucher and financial control system on Aboriginal people in designated areas. This is nothing short of apartheid and has done nothing to alleviate the third world conditions experienced in these remote, uranium filled lands.