

Global Action to Prevent War

A coalition-building effort to stop war,
genocide & internal armed conflict



SUMMARY OF GAPW AUSTRALIA MEETING 23-24TH MARCH 2005 MELBOURNE, VICTORIA

The recently held third meeting of the GAPW's Australian chapter took place at the national office of Australian Volunteers International in Fitzroy, Melbourne. It was held over the Wednesday evening and all day Thursday and 93 people attended over the two days. Invited experts gave presentations which are summarised below and much discussion was had between the presenters and many of the participants around both the GAPW program and its goals and priorities as well as some of the specific issues raised by the presenters. This brief paper gives a summary of the presentations given and some of the broad aims that emerged from the discussions and deliberations over the two days. At the end of the paper is a list of those who indicated that they would like to be involved in an active working group on United Nations reform (interest has also been recorded in relation to nuclear disarmament/arms control, conflict resolution/peace building and civilisation dialogue – those interested in helping to initiate these working groups should email the address given below). If your name is on the list and you no longer wish it to be or if you would like your name added to the list please email: gapw-melb@hotmail.com

PRESENTATIONS:

Joseph Camilleri, Professor of International Relations, La Trobe University

Professor Camilleri in his presentation described the recent focus on terrorism, the “War on Terror” and invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq as reflections of an important part of the historical moment that we find ourselves in. He spoke of how they reflect both the dangers and the opportunities of a moment that may well turn out to be a kind of turning point or watershed in human history. Professor Camilleri told the meeting that in his view, what we have been witnessing during the post-Cold War period is the decline of empire. Professor Camilleri also spoke of what he called “the globalisation of insecurity.” He spoke about the ever increasing strength of those engaged in acts of terrorism against US interests and what this says about the success or otherwise of the “War on Terror.” To this Professor Camilleri added the illegality and illegitimacy of the invasion of Iraq and the strength and nature of the insurgency against Iraq's subsequent occupation by the now much smaller and still declining “Coalition of the Willing.” Professor Camilleri also spoke about what he sees as a strong mood emerging globally advocating a process of critically examining and rethinking of the structure and organisation of human affairs at the global level born out of a realisation that the way we have been operating is unlikely to be sustainable into the future. In this light mention was made of the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's reform agenda released just days before the meeting. Professor Camilleri concluded by outlining some key issues he sees as being in need of being on the

global peace agenda: the need for radical reform of the UN system, the need to revisit the question of nuclear disarmament, the need to strengthen the international rule of law, the importance of civilisational dialogue and the importance of peace building and conflict transformation. For the Australian GAPW chapter, Professor Camilleri urged the participants to reflect on where Australia currently stands in relation to these five issues and how it may play a more constructive role in each of them.

Spencer Zifcak, Associate Professor of Law, La Trobe University

Professor Zifcak spoke to the participants about the legal arguments surrounding the US-led invasion of Iraq as a way of setting a backdrop for examining where the global community and those advocating a global rule of law might hope to proceed. He also spoke about recent developments in regard to the legal aspects of the Iraq war which he claimed have significant bearing on the Australian debate about our involvement in the war yet do not appear to be gaining prominence in Australian public debate. Professor Zifcak also spoke about the legal lessons from the Iraq war and what sort of legal changes will be required for the international community to avoid what he described as the “debacle we have been through.” Professor Zifcak described the Howard government’s decision to join the invasion as disengagement with the rule of law as the invasion constituted a breach of the UN Charter and had no sensible foundation in customary international law. He also spoke about the current emphasis on UN reform and what the challenges are for those interested in the role of international law in this process. Professor Zifcak highlighted the work that needs to be done to codify and institutionalise the idea of “the responsibility to protect” as well as the need to create a UN Security Council able to reach a common view on the use of force in international relations.

Professor Stewart Rees, Director – Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Sydney

Professor Rees addressed the nature and history of the GAPW initiative and its program. He informed the meeting of the discussions and deliberations of the recent GAPW international meeting in Cuenca, Spain at which he was a participant. At this meeting four days were spent on two main topics; the first was the general GAPW program and its priorities and the second was the recent proposal put forward for discussion by certain figures within GAPW relating to the creation of a United Nations Emergency Peace Service (UNEPS). Professor Rees highlighted the regional differences that emerged in these discussions around both the GAPW priorities and focus as well as the specific discussions around the UNEPS proposal. Despite these differences the meeting was able to agree on some areas of priority from the GAPW program; the creation of a core of fifty professional mediators at the disposal of the UN Secretary General and the Security Council, the establishment of a conflict prevention committee in the UN General Assembly, the establishment of a standing volunteer force at the UN, supporting the implementation of Resolution 1325 relating to the role of women in conflict prevention and supporting campaigns in favour of abolishing nuclear weapons and in particular strengthening the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT). As had been mentioned in earlier presentations, Professor Rees also raised the issue (which had also been raised at the Cuenca meeting) of the difficulty of getting peace issues into the mainstream media. He then went on to talk specifically about the UNEPS proposal and some of the issues surrounding the notion of intervention in contemporary international relations. Amongst other ideas, Professor Rees discussed the historical lesson of the seemingly unsurmountable

barrier of sovereignty being overcome in a domestic setting in many countries in relation to domestic violence and compared this to the quest to prevent large-scale violence and genocide. In relation to the specific UNEPS proposal, Professor Rees stressed that while it may be tempting to leave such an idea to international organisations and policy makers to grapple with, the role of civil society in advocating such a service within the UN will be crucial if it is to come to pass.

Iris Wielders, Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Sydney

Iris spoke to the meeting about her involvement with the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict and their particular work on the role of civil society in the prevention of armed conflict. This project involves both research and advocacy in relation to building a new international consensus on the prevention of violent conflict and peace building. This includes creating networks of individuals and groups committed to prevention and peace building at a global, regional and local level as well as raising awareness around the world of issues relating to prevention and peace building and developing a policy change agenda in this area. Iris spoke about her own particular research into Australian aid organisations (both government and non-government) working in conflict zones. She spoke about these groups and their relationship to both conflicts generally and in particular to the idea and practice of conflict prevention. Iris outlined this particularly in relation to qualitative research with aid organisations using interviews and surveys. Iris also discussed some of the wider issues like the relationship between aid and economic development projects and the establishment of sustainable peace in post-conflict zones.

Dr Tilman Ruff, Medical Association for Prevention of War (MAPW)

Dr Ruff addressed the continuing threat to humanity posed by the existence of tens of thousands of nuclear weapons in the world. He spoke of the difference between treating nuclear weapons as the “worst of the bad” in terms of tools of destruction or as something qualitatively different altogether. Dr Ruff spoke to the meeting about the need to reinvigorate the debate around nuclear weapons that while losing much of its former prominence in public debate has lost little of its urgency. He illustrated this by discussing the effects of the actual use of a nuclear weapon on a civilian population with particular reference to the health consequences of not only an initial explosion but the long-term effects of such a catastrophe. Dr Ruff put the nuclear debate into a global context by outlining what he sees as a state of deterioration of international arms control and disarmament initiatives in relation to nuclear weapons as well as discussing Australia’s particular role in this. He spoke of the Howard government’s focus on “horizontal” proliferation while almost completely ignoring the dangers of “vertical” proliferation. Specifically for the GAPW Australian chapter, Dr Ruff advocated the initiative having the complete abolition of nuclear weapons as a very clear overall goal (using the example of the current “Mayors for Peace” initiative to illustrate possible lines of action on this front). He also suggested attempting to change the debate in Australia from one solely focused on horizontal proliferation to one about the dangers of all nuclear weapons (no matter where they are positioned or who controls them) as well as addressing the issues of Australia’s role in the nuclear cycle as a major exporter of uranium and of the use of depleted uranium in Iraq (given that Australia was involved in a military coalition whose members used depleted uranium).

Dimity Hawkins, Medical Association for Prevention of War

Dimity spoke to the participants about the importance of the 1968 Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) particularly given the treaty review conference taking place in New York in May of this year. She outlined the nature and history of the treaty as well as the contexts in which it was established and has since been maintained. Dimity also discussed some of the enduring tensions of the treaty and its application making particular mention of the lack of progress on the part of the nuclear weapons states (as identified by the treaty) in relation to complete nuclear disarmament under chapter VI of the treaty and thus not keeping up on “their side of the bargain.” She also discussed the opportunities raised by the “13 Point Plan” agreed upon at the 2000 treaty review conference. Dimity put the NPT in an Australian context discussing Australia’s role in the treaty after becoming party to it in 1973, making particular mention of the challenge posed to our role within the treaty of Australia’s defence relationship with the United States and role as an international exporter of uranium. Dimity also gave background into Australia’s recent record on arms control and disarmament as well as what Australia’s specific role at this year’s NPT review conference could be particularly in relation to maintaining the integrity of the treaty, supporting the 13 Step Action Plan and promoting the drafting of a Nuclear Weapons Convention.

Discussions:

Discussions over the two days addressed topics raised by the presenters as well as a wide range of issues including the factors leading to war and terrorism, the role of civil society and NGOs in issues of war and peace, links between environmental degradation, poverty and injustice and conflict, Australian militarisation, the Australia-US alliance, appropriate forms of dissent and protest, the media and peace education. Both the possibility of creating small working groups on particular issues and holding another meeting in Melbourne in August or September were also discussed.

Indicated interest in a UN Reform working group:

Ruth Russell, Claire Hanna, Jim Hanna, Ian Fry, Colin Mitchell, Damien Trehwella, Dimity Hawkins, Tania Miletic, Susan Carew, Kiera Longridge, Lyn Watson, Sue Wareham, John McKay.

To remove yourself from this email list or for further information contact:

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