



Australian Shadow for Overseas Aid and Pacific Affairs

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Australia

Thank you to the Government of French Polynesia for inviting me to speak at this very important conference. *[Thanks to any other notable dignitaries in the audience]*. Thank you also to my fellow speakers on this panel for their informative presentations

I would like to congratulate the Government of French Polynesia for bringing together such a distinguished group of people to participate in this important event marking the 40th anniversary of the first French nuclear bomb which exploded in Mururoa on 2 July 1996

I would also note that 2006 marks the 60th anniversary of the United States first atomic testing programme in the Pacific, and the 52nd anniversary of the detonation of the most powerful hydrogen bomb by the United States on Bikini atoll

We have come together here to remember and reflect on these very unfortunate events in our Pacific history. Nonetheless, I would like to take this opportunity to say how encouraged I am that we are all here today in a cooperative spirit to discuss our shared history and strengthen our shared future as regional partners.

Events like this make an important contribution to the developing spirit of Pacific regionalism.

The Pacific community is not just a process or organisation for the powers that be. No longer do we accept that the Pacific is only a playground for the nuclear powers.

Events like this one remind us of the constant objective that we are striving for – namely a Pacific community that is of, by and for the people of the Pacific.

Unfortunately though, as noted in my introduction, for over half a century the Pacific has been a victim of powerful global players who used our region as a convenient place to conduct nuclear experiments without having to be bothered about nuclear fallout in their own backyards

As you will all be aware I am sure, starting as far back as 1946, the United States conducted 67 nuclear tests in the Marshall Islands – 24 on Bikini atoll and 43 on Enewetak Islands

The US used the Pacific as the place to for the largest hydrogen bomb detonation the world had seen

In Australia, my home country, we were also subject to nuclear testing by the British, most notably at Maralinga. Twelve nuclear weapons tests were held in the late 1950s and early



1960s, as well as minor trials which left the area contaminated.

And of course, you here today are experts in this area as a result of your own experience of Pacific nuclear testing. The French detonated 193 nuclear tests in French Polynesia – the largest number of any of the nuclear powers.

We are all painfully aware I am sure that in this region, the tests are not a historical fact, but a living memory, as it was only 10 years ago that the French suspended their own moratorium and conducted more nuclear tests

The fallout for Pacific islanders – and indeed, for many Australians associated with the tests – is a legacy of contamination and disregard for the rights of indigenous Pacific peoples and their environment. It is well-accepted by most in the Pacific that this has brought about countless unknown illnesses and cancers, as well as premature deaths.

We are aware that the great powers are yet to make suitable and adequate reparations to many of those affected in the Pacific.

Unfortunately, in Australia too there are still too many unresolved issues about compensation for veterans and indigenous people who were affected by Britain's nuclear tests

In 2004, the Australian Government accepted in principle that they would respond positively to the needs of veterans affected by the British tests. However, this was reliant on the outcomes of "cancer incidence and mortality study", due to be released at the end of 2004 but which still does not seem to have been made public.

That it has taken so long to respond – considering that the tests were undertaken more than 40 years ago – is deeply troubling.

Aboriginal communities living near the test areas were also affected. Interestingly, in the 1990s, following the (Australian) McClelland Royal Commission into the issue, the British gave the Australian Government \$45 million to rehabilitate the affected sites – and paid \$13.5 million in reparations to the indigenous people affected by the tests.

Justice requires that ALL citizens in this region who were affected by the nuclear tests have their issues properly dealt with by those responsible for the nuclear tests.

In that context, I think that the report of your national Inquiry Commission investigating the consequences of the nuclear testing by France in Polynesia, which was submitted in January this year is extremely significant. I understand that the report accepted proof that the 46 aerial tests held from 1966 to 1974 DID result in radioactive fallout over all of the inhabited archipelagos of Polynesia, contrary to what has always been affirmed by the French military authorities.

It is important that those countries who undertook these tests openly and meaningfully make reparations to the Pacific for their nuclear testing.

In that regard, I strongly endorse the recommendation that at the very least, an archive be set up in the region which constitutes a "memory" of the testing for future generations. Transparency is the first step towards accountability.

I also agree that the health issues associated with the fallout from nuclear tests need to be dealt with as a priority. I am fully aware that there have long been claims by Pacific islanders



that they face a heightened risk of cancer and other serious illnesses as a result of the testing in this region. The human element of the tests cannot be ignored by those responsible.

I would also encourage priority to be given to the decontamination and rehabilitation of affected islands. In this regard, I am aware that in Australia we have been required to undertake substantial work to rehabilitate our own test sites at Maralinga and Emu in South Australia. I am confident that there could be very useful partnerships forged between Australian experts who have first-hand experience of dealing with nuclear fallout and counterparts in the Pacific.

There also needs to be proper development of programmes aimed to promote economic and social development in affected areas.

For the future, perhaps a most important form of moral compensation for victims will be a reinvigorated global effort towards nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament

On the positive side, it is extremely encouraging that France finally ratified the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in 1998. The United Kingdom has also ratified the Treaty. Unfortunately, that treaty has still not entered into force because it lacks 6 key ratifications, including the United States. We all need to stay alert for international opportunities to encourage ratifications of the CTBT.

More generally, in the Pacific we all need to maintain pressure on our neighbours and partners to stay committed to the Non-Proliferation Treaty. As you would all be aware, there is currently considerable concern over Iran and North Korea's activities in this context. The current international discussions about nuclear weapons development and nuclear testing may well provide another opportunity for our Pacific region to raise our own regional concerns with global partners.

As I move to conclude, I would like to repeat that while I am here now as a speaker, I have come to this conference keen to learn from you, my peers and Pacific neighbours.

There are a couple of very topical debates in Australia which I would particularly like to discuss all of you at this Conference so that I can convey those views back to Australia

Firstly, you may be aware that the Australian Government has recently reopened the debate on national nuclear power stations. Possibly in part for purposes of wedge politics, the Government is seeking to open up the possibility of much broader Australian involvement in the nuclear fuel cycle. My own Party has taken a position of limiting Australian involvement in that cycle and in uranium mining. I would be very interested in your views on the current debate on this issue.

Secondly, I would like your feedback on the current approach to indigenous issues that the Australian Government is pursuing.

As you would be well away, Australian history is littered with many shameful episodes in terms of our treatment of our indigenous community. This has resulted in a situation where Aboriginal human development indicators are some of the worst in the world.

The Federal Government, in responding to the complex issues surrounding our handling of indigenous affairs, appears to be pursuing strategies which focus excessively on law and order. In that context, they seem to foreshadow a narrowing of recognition of customary issues as mitigating factors in legal proceedings.



I am concerned that this approach is about cheap populist policies, and will both undermine work on improving justice outcomes for Aborigines as well as sending the wrong message to the Pacific regarding Australia's respect for indigenous cultures

This is a time when a regional Pacific spirit is rapidly evolving and Australia should be taking a lead role in supporting and strengthening this push. We need to be respectful of the diverse cultures and historical experiences of you, our Pacific neighbours, and I for one am keen to take this opportunity to learn more about the Pacific issues which you consider most require attention

To close, I would like to again thank the Government of French Polynesia for taking the lead in organising a conference on such an important issue. As the international community continues to struggle with nuclear related issues, I think it is a very opportune time to call the attention of the great powers to their own nuclear legacies and to encourage them to make appropriate reparations.

The people of the Pacific have been patient for a long time, but as the community of Pacific nations grow in strength and confidence, this is a useful time to put these issues back on the international agenda to ensure that the needs to our Pacific neighbours are properly dealt with.

Thank you. I look forward to talking with many of you during the break.