



Submission on the Defence Amendment (Parliamentary Approval Overseas Service) Bill 2020

The Independent and Peaceful Australia Network Inc submits that the Defence Amendment (Parliamentary Approval Overseas Service) Bill 2020 should be supported as an essential reform to our democratic governance.

The deployment of troops overseas, outside of Australia's territorial landmass and waters, is a matter of extreme importance, and should be avoided at all costs, except for peacekeeping activities. War is the epitome of the failure of human relations and causes untold death and misery, including leading to millions of refugees worldwide, as well as causing destruction of the built and natural environment. Military actions cause huge greenhouse emissions.

It is shameful that Australian forces have on many occasions been deployed overseas without a full parliamentary debate on that deployment, including the justification for it and alternatives to that deployment. The approximate number and type of troops to be deployed and the duration of the deployment should also be provided to parliament. This amendment Bill enables these provisions.

The debate in parliament should cover the circumstances which gave rise to the outbreak of hostilities and the reasons why Australia should be involved in the conflict. The possibilities for how a resolution to the conflict could be achieved should be explored comprehensively. These reports should be made on a regular basis during any deployment of troops outside our territorial limits. This amendment would allow for this full and ongoing debate.

With the climate emergency which countries everywhere are now facing, as well as the global pandemic, we should be using all our efforts and the necessary resources to resolve these planetary-scale problems. It is a failure of politics as well as of human relations to allow countries to descend into violent conflict. Women should play a leading role in negotiations between countries to resolve conflicts.

The fact that our troops have been deployed in the past without debate and thorough discussion in parliament is a significant failure of our democracy. All Australians have a right to be represented and heard in parliament, not just those who voted for the government of the day. It is not democratic for the Prime Minister perhaps in concert with the Cabinet or just a few parliamentarians, to make such important decisions affecting the life and death of Australians as well as people of the other countries involved, without giving the opportunity for other voices to be heard.

Over the last half century, Australian troops have been deployed in major conflicts in Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria. Australians, as well as other peoples, were deceived in relation to the 'need'

to go to war in Iraq. It is likely that this would not have happened if a transparent and thorough parliamentary debate had occurred. Similarly, for all our other deployments.

None of these conflicts were in any way posing a threat to Australia, but the government of the day went ahead with deployments without, it seems clear now, consideration of the major implications of the deployments, nor any clear idea how the conflict could be brought to an end. The option of not being involved was not given a high priority – it should have been and must be in future. The use of force has limited utility in this age of nuclear weapons, possible nuclear obliteration and the climate emergency.

The wars in Iraq and Syria fomented further conflict and instability around the world. The manner of the ending of the war in Afghanistan was a matter of shame, both for the US and Australia. During Australia's engagement in Afghanistan, the lot of ordinary people may have gained some improvement, primarily in relation to the situation of women. However, those gains might have been much greater, if the money and resources expended over 20 years of military action had instead been devoted to aid and peace-building. The displacement of hundreds of thousands of people and the deaths of tens of thousands might have been avoided altogether, had a sensible and democratic process for deciding about international military interventions been in place.

Arguments posed have been that it is necessary to be able to deploy troops at short notice. But it is rarely the case that conflicts between countries arise in a short period of time and it is during the period when possible conflicts are arising that international peace efforts should be made to assist the countries involved to resolve them. Having the ability to deploy Australian troops to any conflict outside our territorial limits at short notice is not a valid argument for precluding a thorough parliamentary debate on any proposed deployment. As outlined above, all efforts should be made to give countries the time and diplomatic help they need to avoid armed conflict.

Australia is in an ideal geographical position to take a non-aligned or even neutral foreign policy position in relation to armed conflict. We should take advantage of that position and develop our diplomatic capabilities to help build peace around the world.

We must invest much more in those diplomatic capabilities and in foreign aid to assist countries to improve their education levels and the provision of basic human needs. Peacebuilding needs resources and skills and Australia should become a leader in this field rather than being too ready to join conflicts which are not of direct concern for Australia's defence.

The resources that we have directed to funding past deployments would have been much better spent in addressing the serious issue of the climate emergency as well as our health, education and social welfare needs.

It is perhaps the fact that (apart from First Nations peoples) we have not had to experience the misery, death and destruction of a war waged on Australian land, that has made us such willing participants in wars on other people's lands. Shame on us.

An opinion poll in 2020 demonstrated that over 80% of Australians believe that there should be the opportunity to debate in parliament any proposed deployment of troops outside of our territorial limits. This Bill would give effect to that majority view of Australians.

We applaud the Defence Amendment (Parliamentary Approval Overseas Service) Bill 2020, and welcome the inclusion of provisions on regular reporting to Parliament on any troop deployments outside Australia's territorial limits, and support it for debate and passing.

We should make every effort to give effect to the UN Declaration of the Right of Peoples to Peace, "*Expressing* the will and the aspirations of all peoples to eradicate war from the life of mankind...". See Appendix A.

Annette Brownlie
Chairperson, IPAN

15 October 2021

APPENDIX A



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Declaration on the Right of Peoples to Peace

The General Assembly,

Reaffirming that the principal aim of the United Nations is the maintenance of international peace and security,

Bearing in mind the fundamental principles of international law set forth in the [Charter of the United Nations](#),

Expressing the will and the aspirations of all peoples to eradicate war from the life of mankind and, above all, to avert a world-wide nuclear catastrophe,

Convinced that life without war serves as the primary international prerequisite for the material well-being, development and progress of countries, and for the full implementation of the

rights and fundamental human freedoms proclaimed by the United Nations,

Aware that in the nuclear age the establishment of a lasting peace on Earth represents the primary condition for the preservation of human civilization and the survival of mankind,

Recognizing that the maintenance of a peaceful life for peoples is the sacred duty of each State,

1. *Solemnly proclaims* that the peoples of our planet have a sacred right to peace;
2. *Solemnly declares* that the preservation of the right of peoples to peace and the promotion of its implementation constitute a fundamental obligation of each State;
3. *Emphasizes* that ensuring the exercise of the right of peoples to peace demands that the policies of States be directed towards the elimination of the threat of war, particularly nuclear war, the renunciation of the use of force in international relations and the settlement of international disputes by peaceful means on the basis of the Charter of the United Nations;
4. *Appeals* to all States and international organizations to do their utmost to assist in implementing the right of peoples to peace through the adoption of appropriate measures at both the national and the international level.

20 November 1984

<http://www.un-documents.net/drpp.htm>