



Communique from a Roundtable on the Summit of the Future

Canberra 6 August 2024

A **Roundtable** held in Canberra on 6 August 2024, the 79th anniversary of the Hiroshima atomic bombing, discussed the **peace and security issues** on the agenda of the **UN Summit of the Future** to be held at the United Nations in New York on 22–23 September 2024.

Meeting as clouds of war hung over Gaza, Ukraine, Sudan and Myanmar, the urgent need to revitalise the role of the United Nations in promoting international peace, development and respect for human rights was affirmed. A short commemoration was observed for the victims of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki A-bombs, noting the UN Secretary General's view that "The only way to eliminate the nuclear risk is to eliminate nuclear weapons."ⁱ

Convened by the University of Melbourne's Initiative for Peacebuilding, the United Nations Association of Australia and the ACT Branch of the Australian Institute of International Affairs, more than 100 participated in person with a further 150 online. The program included some of Australia's best-informed academics and peace practitioners as well as leading negotiators from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade led the discussions in Canberra. Two special guests contributed remotely from Geneva. The program for the day is [available here](#).

Following the 75th anniversary celebrations of the United Nations in 2020, the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres launched a review that concluded with the report *Our Common Agenda* issued in 2021. The report initiated negotiations among the UN member states that will come to fruition on 22–23 September 2024 in New York at the Summit where a 'Pact for the Future' will be adopted by UN member states.

The Roundtable recognised UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres' deep concern expressed in the summary of the Our Common Agenda where he lamented the scale and complexity of the problems facing our world: "We are at an inflection point in history. In our biggest shared test since the Second World War, humanity faces a stark and urgent choice: a breakdown or a breakthrough."ⁱⁱ

In preparation for the Summit, six [background briefs](#) were prepared to stimulate discussion on the following themes:

- **Impunity, Accountability and Respect for Human Rights and the Rule of Law** by Prof Erika Feller AO FAIA
- **Luck Is Not a Strategy: It's Time to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons** by Gem Romuld, A/Prof Tilman Ruff AO and Melissa Parke
- **Rising to the Challenge: how Australia can Help Strengthen the UN Peacebuilding Commission** by Russell Rollason AM, Adrian Morrice, Simon Richards and Jacob Berah



United Nations Association of Australia



Australian Institute of International Affairs
ACT Branch



Initiative for Peacebuilding

- **Transform or Die: The Case for Reforming the UN Security Council** by Prof John Langmore AM and Prof Ramesh Thakur
- **Strengthening Australian Diplomacy** by Prof John Langmore AM, Dr Tania Miletic and Dr David Richardson
- **Autonomous Weapons Must Be Controlled Urgently** by Matilda Byrne

Discussions at the Roundtable spanned five sessions summarised below. The key points include a reference to the relevant paragraph in the Pact of the Future (Revision 2).

1. Restoring International Peace and Security

The Roundtable was introduced as 'A Day of Ambition'

- Australia should lean into **national prevention strategies** linking sustainable development and peacebuilding. (Pact Action 18d)
- **Prevention must be a key feature** of the Pact for the Future. Australia should work to ensure prevention has a stronger emphasis in the Pact: **"Don't bomb schools"**.
- Prevention – UN Charter Article 99 – Secretary General could use his powers under Article 99 to bring more situations to the attention of the UN Security Council (UNSC) – as he did on Gaza. Such actions can help shift the focus to prevention of armed conflict.
- SDG 16 is not mentioned in the draft Pact yet so many issues addressed in the Pact are related to SDG16 indicators – peaceful, inclusive societies; justice; accountable institutions. The link to SDG 16 should be made.
- Balance of resources and focus – proportion of resources that goes to **military industrial complex versus** the funding for **diplomacy and prevention and humanitarian action**. (Pact Action 13c)
- **UN Security Council reform** – Australia should support reform of the Security Council by advocating for an increase in the number of elected members, a position that has wide support within UN member states. (Pact Action 42)
- **Australia should accelerate the implementation of commitments on women and peace and security**; including concrete and meaningful participation of women. (Pact Action 19)
- Support **peacebuilding competencies and professionalisation**, including developing expertise for Australians in NGOs and civil society.
- Elevate mechanisms in the Peacebuilding Commission that **support consultative and inclusive approaches (including with women, civil society, First Nations Peoples) working both across governments and beyond to promote and systemise inclusion**. (Pact Action 13b)
- In an increasingly complex world, many actors can contribute to coherence in peacebuilding approaches. Australia could strengthen its commitment to **increased regional involvement** in peace building, through actors such as the African Union, Economic Community of West African States, Intergovernmental Authority in Development, South African Development Coordination Conference, Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF).
- Australia should encourage **all nations** to heed rulings of International Criminal Court (ICC) and International Court of Justice (ICJ). (Pact Action 17)



United
Nations
Association
of Australia



Australian Institute
of International Affairs
ACT Branch



Initiative for
Peacebuilding

- Encourage the Government to acknowledge that 21st century challenges need new approaches and courageous leadership **to step up to promote regional and global peacebuilding efforts.**

The Peacebuilding Commission

- The Summit comes at an important time for Australia because in 2025, Australia will take up a two-year seat at UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) which will provide opportunities for Australia to pursue the peace issues raised at the Summit. Australia is also standing for election to the Security Council in 2028.
- The PBC needs a **stronger mandate** from the Security Council. Australia can contribute to the PBC through leadership, diplomacy and prevention. This could be improved through an integrated UN peacebuilding strategy for conflict-affected countries or those in danger of conflict.
- Australia too could benefit from a more comprehensive whole-of-government **peacebuilding strategy**, identifying and strengthening core competencies as well as involving civil society. Such a strategy could also help define areas for action by Australia in the PBC.
- There is a strong case for **strengthening UN Special Political Missions (SPM)**, clarifying when they are needed and developing a more comprehensive approach for the PBC in African countries. (Pact Action 16)
- Work to ensure that peacebuilding does not unintentionally bolster authoritarian, military elites, because it focuses at the executive level of ‘governments’. This issue should be addressed directly with a view to establishing equitable political settlements, with less involvement of elites and more inclusive involvement of women and First Nations Peoples with input from other key stakeholders including civil society.
- **More distributive, less hierarchical approaches** are needed. We need to do business in a way that is capable of addressing the problems and supporting those best placed to provide a solution.

2. Reining in the Monster: Nuclear Disarmament and Autonomous Weapons Systems

The nuclear shadow of the Cold War has re-emerged

- Disarmament is currently in reverse. The New START Agreement, the last remaining constraint on US and Russian nuclear weapons, will expire in 2026. No negotiations for a successor treaty are underway and prospects for this look bleak.
- **Disarmament must be bipartisan.** It has been in the past, but is not so at present.
- Australia should **strengthen partnerships** with countries like Japan, South Korea and Indonesia on disarmament.
- The Pact needs to have practical steps for disarmament. (Pact Action 27a)
- This is an opportunity for Australia to **revitalise arms control**, including engaging with China. (Pact Action 27)
- Nuclear weapons are a **climate issue**. Nuclear war would trigger nuclear winter and unprecedented global famine. Climate stress is increasing risk of conflict. Military emissions are large, not reported and subject to no mitigation.



United
Nations
Association
of Australia



Australian Institute
of International Affairs
ACT Branch



Initiative for
Peacebuilding

- Australia can play a key role as a **middle power and an ally of the US**. Australia should **use its relationship with the US** to remind them of their disarmament commitments. (Pact Action 27)
- The 1996 ICJ advisory opinion on the *Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons* should be upheld. The obligation is not only to negotiate, but to achieve nuclear disarmament in all its aspects. This obligation applies to all states.
- Need to strengthen **current international humanitarian law frameworks**. (Pact Action 26)
- Australia should sign the **Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)** urgently. The ALP national policy platform has included a commitment to sign and ratify the TPNW since 2018. There is a need to be consistent and sign the treaty without delay, and in the meantime avoid adding further obstacles to compliance, including by ensuring visiting naval vessels and aircraft are not carrying nuclear weapons.

‘This is our generation’s Oppenheimer moment’

- **Killing by algorithm** – Australia is a leading contributor in this area of AI weapons.
- AI is referred to as the **third revolution of war**: first is gun powder, second is nuclear and third is autonomous weapons.
- Use of **facial recognition** technology in AI risks leading to systemic discrimination, based on gender and race.
- Use of AI can lead to **unwanted escalation** of conflict due to machine error. It also lowers the threshold for war. Proliferation of the technology is increasing with risks associated with access by non-state actors.
- Need to examine the moral and ethical dimensions of AI development, not only the legal, especially regarding Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems. Australia should support the negotiations for a **legally binding instrument** to address autonomous weapons systems with prohibitions and regulations. (Pact Action 28)

3. The Rule of Law: Ending impunity, strengthening accountability and respect for human rights

‘Multilateralism is not a global government, but exists to improve governance’

- **Impunity**: There needs to be increased action by States to reinforce efforts to address the impunity gaps and better protect civilians by developing national policy frameworks.
- **Accountability**: Lack of accountability undermines trust in the multilateral system and also in the Rule of Law.
- **Responsibility** of the State to protect and uphold International Humanitarian Law.
- **Prevention**: There is a disconnect between the UN’s prevention agenda and its response mechanisms. Breaking down the silo approach within the UN between mechanisms needs to be pursued.
- It is in the interests of the Australian government to reinforce human rights in the Pact for the Future.
- Australia should increase its **support for the UN Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights**. The recently established Human Rights Inquiry Office has no funds, and



United Nations
Association
of Australia



Australian Institute
of International Affairs
ACT Branch



Initiative for
Peacebuilding

Australia could consider funding this office. As the key institution for the UN's human rights pillar, with a heavy coordination role in the UN system, the High Commissioner's office is also now too small to fulfil properly its mandate. The Office deserves Australia's support.

- Undertake a review of what Australia is doing and can additionally do at the national level to contribute to greater respect for IHL and human rights internationally.
- Need to emphasise the importance of '**constructive internationalism**' as International Humanitarian Law is under attack in many parts of the world.

4. Australian Government's preparations

The focus of the Australian government on the Pact for the Future can be summarised as:

1. Focus on the founding pillars of the UN
2. Supporting the UN to be more effective
3. Commitment to supporting the SDGs
4. Supporting more sources of financing
5. Recommitting to representative financing
6. Enhancing multi-stakeholder engagement in solving complex challenges

Australia is committed to practical constructive efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons.

Australia supports increasing accountability and transparency on nuclear risk reduction.

Australia is committed to pursuing pathways to the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW).

Australia is to sit on the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and will be campaigning for a seat on the UN Security Council in 2028.

Declaration on Future Generations, a Global Digital Compact, and the New Agenda for Peace will also be on the agenda as well as the Pact for the Future.

As Foreign Minister Wong has noted in regard to Australia's participation in multilateral forums, including the UN: **"You are either at the table or you are on the menu."**ⁱⁱⁱ

During Question Time, a plea was made for DFAT to reconstitute the National Consultative Committee on Peace and Disarmament that used to meet regularly to share information and local on-the-ground knowledge about unstable regions between civil society and DFAT.

5. Key reforms for the Summit

Five different pillars were agreed for the Pact for the Future:

- i. Sustainable development
- ii. Peace and Security
- iii. Youth and the Future
- iv. Science and technology
- v. Reform of the global governance system (led by the UN)



United
Nations
Association
of Australia



Australian Institute
of International Affairs
ACT Branch



Initiative for
Peacebuilding

The Global South (developing countries) are expressing a need for rebalance internationally, especially in managing the impacts of climate action.

It is unclear if UNSC reform or UN regulation of AI will be clearly articulated in the Pact.

The Summit could be a global normative moment like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; on this occasion on the contribution of Youth and Future Generations' Rights.

Key issues for the Summit and the Pact:

- Environment needs greater focus in the Pact. The Triple planetary crisis – pollution, biodiversity collapse and climate change – needs to be mentioned.
- UN Security Council reform is urgent. The Secretary General is due to issue his report on reform before the Summit.
- Future of Peace Operations. The review of UN peacebuilding architecture planned for 2025 will have implications for the PBC, and will lead in to review of the PBC.
- What changes are needed in the UN and the way it is structured and operates?
- Which are the points of contention that will require further international negotiation?
- What proposed actions fall within the realm of possible action?

The rights of **future generations** will be a key area of discussion. A key issue should be the desire to see the environment not be subordinated to development.

Future Generation Rights: what are they? Freedom from fear; freedom from want; manage the world in a way that enables future generations to enjoy these freedoms. Not just “freedom from” but also “of/ for” peace and security.

Strengthening links between UN and regional bodies might be possible.

Conclusion

Australia's delegation to the Summit is expected to be led by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator Penny Wong. At the Indian Ocean Conference in Perth in February 2024, Senator Wong noted that “Across our region, we see military power is expanding, but measures to constrain military conflict are not – and there are few concrete mechanisms for averting it.” We strongly support the Minister's view that “Peacebuilding today must rise to this potentially catastrophic challenge”.

The Minister's commitment to peacebuilding is shared and we look with enthusiasm to Australia's participation in and contributions to the Summit of the Future and to the drafting of the Pact of the Future to be adopted at the Summit.

The Roundtable looked forward to seeing Australia's commitment to peacebuilding reflected in increased investment in and financial support for conflict prevention, peacebuilding and diplomacy, globally, in our region, and in Australia.

ⁱ United Nations Secretary-General statement on Hiroshima Day 2024. United Nations, New York

ⁱⁱ ‘Our Common Agenda’, Report of the Secretary-General, Published by the United Nations New York, p3

ⁱⁱⁱ ‘Securing our Future’, Foreign Minister Senator Penny Wong's speech to the ANU National Security College, 9 April 2024



United Nations
Association
of Australia



Australian Institute
of International Affairs
ACT Branch



Initiative for
Peacebuilding