

Libbe HaLevy, producer and host of podcast Nuclear Hotseat introduced Melissa Parke: “As of September 1st of this year..Melissa Parke became the executive director of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons. Melissa is a former Australian Minister for International Development and a former member of Parliament for the Australian Labor Party from 2007 to 2016. As an MP, she regularly voiced support for nuclear disarmament, including as a member of a cross-party parliamentary group dedicated to the cause. She has also been an ambassador for ICAN Australia and served as a patron of the Tom Uren and Memorial Fund, which supports ICAN's work. She brings a subtle, powerful boldness to her speaking as well as a poetic way of expressing herself. Here's what she said to welcome the hundreds of campaigners from around the world.(Recorded by Nuclear Hotseat podcast, Au/Adobe PremierPro not error free! transcription)

MELISSA PARKE. ICAN NYC Nov. 26, 2023, Sunday The Brick Church

Good morning, everyone. Good morning and thank you all for being here. Being here in New York for this week and for today, I've only been executive director of ICAN for less than three months, but I know already that I'm in a room full of friends, a room full of people passionately committed to humanity and our beautiful planet.

For those who don't know, my background is as international lawyer with the United Nations in places like Kosovo, Gaza, Lebanon, New York, and Yemen. I saw firsthand the impact of war on civilians. I have a treasured memory of attending a Hiroshima commemoration ceremony in Gaza 21 years ago, and there were (I was at Gaza Harbo) and there were hundreds of Palestinian children, and they'd made little paper boats with candles in them. And they lit the candles and set the boats afloat on the water. And it was extremely beautiful, but also incredibly moving to think that here were children who themselves were being subjected to bombing on a regular basis, remembering children in another time and place who been bombed. And that memory has particular resonance right now, of course, given the current events.

Following my time in the U.N., I was elected to the Australian Parliament and served for nine years as a Federal Parliamentarian and Minister for International Development. The constituency that I represented was Fremantle in Western Australia, a fantastic city of very progressive, caring people who (and the city of Fremantle) declared itself a nuclear weapons free zone. It's the home of sorts, of nuclear disarmament in Western Australia and it's part of the Mayors For Peace Campaign and the ICAN Cities Appeal. So I had a lot of dealings with that when I was in Parliament.

*I was also very inspired by the memory of former Australian minister and member of Parliament **Tommy Uren**, who had years earlier been a prisoner of war in Japan just outside Nagasaki, and he witnessed the atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki and when he came home he spent the rest of his life campaigning for peace and nuclear disarmament and said the struggle against nuclear weapons is the most important struggle for the human race.*

*During my time in Parliament, I was very focused on human rights, environment, disarmament, and social justice, particularly for Australia's Aboriginal peoples. And you may have heard that Australia recently voted NO in a referendum to recognize Aboriginal Australians in the Australian Constitution as the first Australians through a voice to Parliament. This would have been a body that would have only had power to make recommendations to the Parliament, not a decision making body, not a veto making body. It was a very modest request, but it was voted down by an Australia that has yet to come to terms with its appalling colonial legacy. And I know that **Karina Lester**, one of the survivors of British nuclear tests, is here with us today. Thank you for making the trip. Karina is an ICAN Australia ambassador as well, so you probably know each other very well.*

*I want to acknowledge what Australia hasn't... I want to acknowledge the Aboriginal people of Australia as the first Australians and acknowledge the gentle stewardship of the land for tens of thousands of years. Indigenous peoples of the world have always understood the connection between all things, people, animals, all of nature, and that there is a natural balance that must be respected. I'm convinced that most of the problems facing the world today: nuclear weapons, climate change, mass extinctions, **even war**- stem from humanity's disconnection, a sense of separation from nature and from each other, from forgetting that we on this planet are all ultimately connected. Our way back rests in*

rediscovering that truth. ICAN Australia where, of course, ICAN began- has recently commemorated the 70th anniversary of the British nuclear weapons testing- of which Aboriginal Australians were the primary victims (along with their veterans and neighbors in the Pacific) and endured decades of nuclear weapons testing- as did peoples of North America, Algeria and the steps of Kazakhstan.

*I pay tribute, too, to the **Hibakusha** for their strength and courage in telling their stories again and again in the hope that the world will finally come to its senses. The horror of this past legacy of nuclear weapons use and testing is amplified by the very real and justified concern that nuclear weapons will be used again by design or accident, that the way they pose an existential threat to all life on earth every moment they exist is unacceptable. That concern is one of the reasons we're all here. The other reason is our confidence and our determination that together we can eliminate nuclear weapons. As Margaret Mead famously said: "Never doubt that a small group of committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." Well, look around this room. We're not a small group anymore, and together we are changing the world.*

The TPNW has already created a norm against nuclear threats. TPNW has already led to widespread acknowledgment of the importance of victim assistance and environmental remediation from nuclear weapons use and testing. TPNW has already led financial institutions to divest billions of dollars from nuclear weapons investment. The TPNW is the only place where disarmament action is actually happening, and we expect many more great things to come out of this second Meeting of States Parties -which we'll shortly be hearing about. But after this meeting of States Parties, how do we keep the momentum going? There is not another MSP until 2025. It is my strong belief that we need to broaden the discussion about nuclear weapons beyond the silos of security and disarmament, we need to emphasize that the abolition of nuclear weapons is an essential part of protecting and respecting the planet, the climate, humanity and all living things. We need to stress the interconnectedness of nuclear weapons with the environment, with health, with human rights and development. There can be no nuclear weapons on a sustainable planet. This is the continuation of the democratization of the nuclear weapons debate that the TPNW has started. It's a call for greater connection, compassion and creativity. And all of you are an essential part of that. I look forward to working with you in the months and years ahead.

Libbe HaLevy, producer and host of podcast **Nuclear Hotseat**, ends this transcript saying: " Thank you Melissa Parke, the executive director of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons."

Transcript posted by Peace Action Maine, MSpiess responsible for errors 12/12/23
Our lifeway as humans