

DPG Pathways to Nuclear Disarmament Project

“Australian Perspectives on Nuclear Non-Proliferation”

Delhi Policy Group in its continuing program on Pathways to Nuclear Disarmament arranged a Round Table Meeting on 3 November 2010. The meeting was addressed by H.E. Mr. Peter Varghese, Australian High Commissioner to India and was attended by a group of experts on Nuclear issues. Mr. Varghese's talk is summarized and paraphrased in the following paragraph. The Australian High Commissioner's incisive talk was followed by a lively discussion, which covered Australian policy going beyond the NPT.

Australia's world view has undergone a significant shift in recent decades and now has a global perspective. It is based on economic, trade and regional factors in addition to security needs. The crucible of Australian security interests is East Asia, in which its economic and strategic issues lie. Australia has seen itself as a bridge between the strategic players of North East Asia and its closer neighbours in South East Asia. India plays a significant part in these calculations.

Australia's non-proliferation policy is a subset of its strategic policy. The objectives of Non Proliferation Treaty contribute to strategic stability. Australia is thus a strong proponent of the NPT and its member states' obligations. The new challenges of NPT *break-out* states and *outlier-states* need therefore, to be met energetically and innovatively.

Australian policy on the sale of Uranium was based on its commitment to NPT. Its decision to sell uranium only to NPT states was not an anti-India policy but a pro-NPT policy. After India obtained a NSG exception, which Australia supported, the policy was changed. The NPT cannot and should not be abandoned or amended. At the same time NPT does not provide a complete solution to the reality of 'break-out' and 'outlier' states. Australia takes note of the fact that the international community is moving towards a 'NPT Plus' approach.

The need now is for a multi-pronged strategy. Such a strategy should uphold the NPT, strengthen the will and capacity of the international community to deal with proliferation threats, while also finding a way to entrench good non proliferation behaviour irrespective of NPT membership.