Dear Ms Bishop

MPG corresponded with the previous government on the question of Australia’s involvement in the United States’ use of weaponised ‘drones’. In a letter dated 29 May, over the signature of Mr Greg French of DFAT, our group was assured that Australia urges ‘all States to ensure that their use of weapons complies with international law’.

Since the date of Mr French’s letter there have been two significant developments.

1. Revelations made by Mr Edward Snowden have made it clear that facilities on Australian territory (at Pine Gap) are involved in the guidance of US drones. This was reported at length by Mr Phillip Dorling in an article that appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald on July 21, 2013.

2. The UN’s Rapporteur on the question of extra-judicial executions, Mr Christof Heyns, has reported to the UN General Assembly. His report concludes that the use of drones presents a danger to the protection of life – making the legal compliance of many drone attacks highly questionable.

To summarise, it is clearly evident that Australia is deeply implicated in the legally questionable use of weaponised drones by a foreign power (the US) - a state of affairs in very stark contrast to urging ‘all States to ensure their use of weapons complies with international law’.

Australia holds an influential position on the UN Security Council, and could (and certainly should) exercise control over what happens at the Pine Gap facility. These two factors make Australia uniquely well-positioned to bring the US’s use of weaponised drones to a halt, if only it had the political will. Nothing short of halting the US’s program can ensure that Australia is not implicated in the extra-judicial executions of innocent civilians.

The matter is made all the more pressing by the recent killing in Pakistan of Taliban leader, Hakimulla Mehsud, by a US drone – an action taken despite the Pakistani government’s request that US drone attacks on its territory cease and one that may derail peace talks and bring about a review of the relationship between the two countries.

It is time Australia took a principled stand. The Marrickville Peace Group calls on the Australian government to bring the US’s use of weaponised drones, guided through Pine Gap, to an end.

Sincerely

Nick Deane
For Marrickville Peace Group.