Address to the First Committee by the
Executive Secretary of the
Preparatory Commission for the
Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization
Ambassador Tibor Tóth

15 October 2008

I have the honour to report to you today on the status of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and on progress achieved by the Preparatory Commission. The purpose of the Commission is to promote the entry into force of the Treaty and to establish a global verification regime to monitor compliance with its provisions. I am pleased to report that with the recent signatures we have become a 180 member strong organization.

While nine countries remain whose ratification is still necessary for the Treaty to enter into force we are approaching the universalization and implementation of the CTBT – a comprehensive ban on nuclear testing, for all and for all time. And so we, as a preparatory commission, are making all necessary preparations to ensure that the verification regime is ready from day one. You can appreciate that this is not a small task.

The system itself is to comprise 337 facilities traversing the territory of 89 countries, each hosting a diverse range of recording equipment across four key technologies. A system operated and maintained by nearly five hundred operators around the globe and around the clock. A Global Communications Infrastructure of 250 VSAT communication assets relaying recorded data through six geostationary satellites back to Operations in Vienna in real time. A team of experts in the International Data Centre analysing incoming information and comparing the data to Treaty-specific time lines. While at the same time those data are being viewed by Member States and institutions across the globe in possibly the most open verification democracy of its kind. And ultimately, should the need arise, the launching of an on-site inspection team to survey an area of approximately 1000 square kilometres for a potential nuclear blast.

A number of important steps have been made in the build-up of the verification regime since I last stood before you. Nearly 70 per cent of the International Monitoring System has been certified to date. You will recall that the system was able to record and attribute the nuclear event in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) in 2006 with 180 facilities in
place at that time. By the end of this year we will have 250 facilities transmitting data back to the International Data Centre in Vienna. During the present mid-term cycle we have tripled the number of facilities in operations. The build-up has been steady across all key technologies of the verification system. The event in the DPRK underscored the importance of the noble gas element of the radionuclide network. Compared to the limited noble gas network we had at that time the number of our noble gas stations will be doubled by the end of this year. Had the new stations with improved geographical saturation been in place at the time of the DPRK event, the readings would have been 50 times higher than those recorded in 2006.

This year we undertook the migration to a new platform for our Global Communications Infrastructure. This is virtually complete and “GCI II” is now up and running and relaying data back and forth across the globe. And it is just as well. The volume of data being transmitted from monitoring facilities to the International Data Centre has tripled in recent years. The daily volume of data products provided to States Signatories has doubled. Software improvements have led to the delivery of more detailed and significantly higher quality data products.

As the benefits derived from these products have expanded, so has access to them. Recently we have crossed two important numerical barriers: as of now more than 1000 authorized institutions in over 100 countries have direct access to the data generated by the International Monitoring System. And those data are proving themselves more and more useful not just for verification but in civil and scientific applications as well. For example, in providing more time-efficient information to tsunami warning alert centres. Our system is the fastest, most reliable and highest quality data provider to international and national tsunami warning centres. These are important life saving applications. Data provision arrangements have been signed in the past few months with Japan, the Philippines and Australia. Similar arrangements will soon be signed with Indonesia, with more countries to follow.

With the CTBT verification regime a new standard of transparency has been achieved. It represents a new democracy in the verification of multilateral disarmament and non-proliferation instruments. But you need not take our word for it. Recently the Commission initiated an International Scientific Studies (ISS) project in cooperation with the international scientific community. The main purposes of the ISS are twofold. Firstly, the purpose is to assess the capability of the verification system that is now approaching full implementation. Secondly, the purpose is to explore if the scientific community can provide additional tools that will further improve our data analyses. This process will conclude next year with a conference in June for all participants in the project. We look forward to a wide participation of the States Signatories, institutions and the scientific community in the project and the conference itself.

In September of this year, we took a massive step forward in our preparations for on-site inspections. A team of trained inspectors journeyed to Kazakhstan to conduct the first integrated field exercise of its kind under the concept of Treaty on-site inspection. The exercise provided a unique opportunity for the Commission to test in an integrated manner major elements of the on-site inspection regime. 200 participants were deployed in the former nuclear weapon test site of Semipalatinsk, an area roughly the size of a small country. They brought with them over 50 tonnes of equipment to be tested over 30 days in the field. Mock negotiations were conducted and technical procedures were practised. Integrated analysis took place on location. A wide range of equipment and technologies were thoroughly put through their paces. Radionuclide surveys were conducted, as well as ground and aerial
gamma arrays, environmental sampling and passive seismological monitoring. Many valuable lessons were learned, which will be fed into our on-site inspection preparations as we move forward. The fourth and final arm of the verification regime is greatly strengthened as a result.

We have progressed to quite an advanced state. Instead of talking about separate components of the regime, we can now talk of an integrated system of systems, functioning in a holistic way. In many respects, the system is achieving a high level of maturity. But, let us not get ahead of ourselves. As with any journey, the last mile is often the longest.

It is almost 20 years since the Cold War ended, and with it the specter of global nuclear catastrophe. A specter that seemed to haunt us for so long. This, fortunately, is no longer the case. Or, at least, the fear is no longer what it once was. But the threat remains. Out of sight, out of mind for some perhaps. But still, it remains a threat. The urgency with which that threat must be countered - with which we must advance nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation - has lost its grip on our imagination. We have taken our eyes off the ball. The great challenge before us, is to generate awareness of the gravity of the nuclear dangers that we face. And to create a new consensus on how to tackle these dangers.

The ban on nuclear testing is now more necessary than ever. The CTBT is an important measure in its own right. It is a quick brand recognition tool of progress on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. I ask you to contemplate the importance of progress on CTBT entry into force on the 2010 NPT Review Conference. What could better demonstrate the international community’s commitment to non-proliferation and disarmament at this critical juncture?

It also has the potential to act as a catalyst for progress in other crucial areas of the disarmament and non-proliferation regime: further reduction of strategic and sub-strategic nuclear weapons, de-alerting nuclear arsenals and achieving a fissile material cut-off treaty.

Looking to the future, we see compelling reasons to establish the CTBT proper in the international rule book. Nuclear energy is expected to experience its renaissance. Concerns about energy security are moving alternative energy solutions to the forefront. So too the potential threat posed by global warming, as its effects become more apparent in our daily lives. The potential resurgence of nuclear energy rests at the crux of these two defining issues on the international agenda.

The IAEA has forecast annual growth rates over the course of the next 20 years that give reason to pause and think: How will the international community deal with an increase of nuclear energy as predicted? How can we ensure a system of access to nuclear energy for peaceful purposes that is fair, secure, safe and safeguarded? These questions fall to all of us to answer. Such resurgence will almost certainly lead to an increase in the numbers of countries, facilities, institutions and individuals managing a wider array of sensitive nuclear fuel cycle components with a significantly enlarged amount of fissile material. Such a surge across the board will make it more difficult than ever to differentiate between prohibited and permitted nuclear activities. We are moving in a direction where the decision between nuclear energy for peaceful or for weapons purposes will be based more on political grounds than on technical ones.

As nuclear energy is promoted to address energy security and climate change challenges, this promotion must go hand in hand with a strengthening of the non-proliferation and
disarmament regime. A regime that has been weakened in recent years. Holes are developing in the barriers erected in front of nuclear weapons for much of the latter part of the 20th century. The nuclear testing of recent years underscored not just the need for the ban, but the urgency with which we had to get there. The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty together with other measures urgently needed can fill these holes. The Treaty is the last and most visible legal and technical barrier to the development of nuclear weapons. It can keep the non-proliferation and disarmament regime from unravelling, as we progress through the 21st century and attempt to navigate the compound challenges facing our world.

Challenges that, as we learn the lessons of the financial melt-down, must not be kept unattended, left simply to forces of sheer competition. Challenges that, even more than in other volatile areas of our turbulent daily lives, require regulation. Challenges that do not forgive complacency. Challenges that must be faced promptly, decisively and collectively.

Unfortunately, we are still kept at the gate. The Treaty’s own built-in mechanism means that 44 listed countries must ratify the CTBT before it can enter into force. And we are still nine ratifications away from that goal.

With recent signatures we have become a 180 member strong organization. We are five ratifications away from crossing soon the 150 barrier, a robust increase from around one hundred ratifications five years ago. We are approaching the universalisation and implementation of the CTBT – there can be no doubt about that.

The test ban is the manifestation of a dream dreamt by the best minds this universe produced. The dream of Einstein, the scientist. The dream of Schweitzer, the humanist. The dream of Nehru, the politician.

Banning testing was always central to their vision. A vision later mobilized through the efforts of successive leaders. Through their convictions. And through their propensity to lead. But also, crucially, through their capacity to act.

To act as they did in 1963, when in the wake of the Cuban missile crisis the first step to ban nuclear weapon tests was forged in a matter of weeks with the Partial Test Ban Treaty. To act as they did in 1968 when the bedrock for nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation – the Non-Proliferation Treaty – was laid, and the call for a comprehensive ban on testing was cemented. And, to act as they did in the mid 1990s, when in record time the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty was finally cast into agreement.

As we sit here now the Treaty is waiting for entry into force. This unprecedented global joint venture of ours represents a massive political, financial and human investment. This arrangement is erected on top of half a century of political efforts. The verification regime is worth one billion dollars. The system is embodying ten thousand scientific person years. This great endeavour of scientists and people alike is waiting to enter into force and enter into full operations. Because that is what it was dreamt to do. That is what it was built to do. And that is what it stands ready to do.