Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization

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Exchange with the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs and other high-level officials in the field of arms control and disarmament

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Mr Chairman,
Distinguished delegates,

Introduction

Allow me to congratulate you, Mr Chairman, on your appointment as chair of the First Committee of the 71st session of the United Nations General Assembly.

I would also like to express my appreciation to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Mr Kim Won-soo, for convening this important exchange. The efforts you and your staff have made to focus and enliven this discussion are very welcome indeed.

The CTBT in nuclear security

This afternoon we are asked to consider how our organizations “prevent and respond to attacks using chemical, biological, nuclear or radiological materials”.

This is highly pertinent to our work. And it is quite timely, particularly given the current state of geopolitical affairs.

Although there have been some truly historic achievements in international diplomacy in recent years, such as the JCPOA and the Paris Climate Agreement, we have also witnessed a decrease in trust and confidence between many States on critical global security issues. This is particularly troubling when we think about the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, where the consequences of mistrust and hostility can result in catastrophe.

All sovereign States consider their national interests in different ways, and this shapes their world views and foreign policy decisions. However, we must never lose sight of the fact that it is in the common
interest of all States to prevent the use of weapons of mass destruction. The world has experienced the horrors of such weapons on too many occasions, and we have a shared responsibility to act.

For this reason, the international community decided to put in place a legal and technical framework to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, paving the way for their ultimate elimination. The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty was negotiated and concluded in this context, and was opened for signature almost exactly twenty years ago.

Twenty years ago common security and multilateralism trumped narrow self-interest and zero-sum defensive postures.

We need a return to that spirit. Without mutual trust, confidence, and a participatory framework established upon the principles of equality and democracy, how can we ever expect to thrive in an interdependent world?

The CTBT and its verification regime embody the attributes that are essential for progress, not only in nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, but international peace and prosperity more broadly. Security Council resolution 2310, adopted last month, gives explicit recognition to this.

The Treaty has now been signed by 183 States and, with Swaziland and Myanmar recently completing their procedures, ratified by 166. It is one of the most adhered-to instruments in nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. It is backed up by a robust verification regime. It is a model for international cooperation and confidence building.

**Prevention and response**

As we consider how we best prevent and respond to threats, we must keep the broader picture in mind. Today’s topic is a sharp reminder of how the global nuclear security framework is so inter-connected. It also reminds us of the need to move the nuclear security agenda forward by working together on matters of common agreement.

We all want to put an end to nuclear explosions for all time, and move steadily in the direction of eliminating the dangerous legacies of the Cold War. We should recall that the only true guarantee of the non-use of nuclear weapons is to achieve their complete, transparent, irreversible, and verifiable elimination.

Quite simply, the CTBT pulls the brakes on the development of nuclear weapons technologies by those that have them. It also severely constrains the development of nuclear weapons for first time proliferators. The fewer countries that possess nuclear weapons, the less likely they will ever be used.

As a result of the successful build-up of the International Monitoring System (IMS), we have at our disposal a global network of stations and laboratories with proven value in nuclear disaster response and mitigation. And IMS data can equally be applied in responding to nuclear and radiological attacks or accidents.

We made data available for this purpose following the Fukushima disaster in 2011, and went on to join the Inter-Agency Committee on Radiological and Nuclear Emergencies (IACRNE). But in addition to these cross-UN system efforts, it should be kept in mind that we have a real comparative advantage in bridging international and national response. IMS stations are owned and operated by Member States, and we also have networks of National Data Centres and National Authorities linked through the Organization.

The benefits of IMS data are at the disposal of the international community now.
Security Council

This brings me to the resolution adopted by the Security Council on 23 September 2016. This was momentous for a number of reasons. Partly because it is the very first CTBT-specific resolution by the Council. But also because of its content. The resolution calls upon States to support the CTBTO in its tasks, even before entry into force. This is a clear recognition of the importance of the verification regime for international peace and security, and reinforces the resolution adopted twenty years ago by the States Signatories themselves for purposes of carrying out the necessary preparations for the effective implementation of the CTBT. Each State Signatory has a role to play.

Conclusion

Mr Chairman,

Twenty years ago last month, UN Member States voted by an overwhelming majority to adopt the CTBT and open the Treaty for signature. This was without question one of the most important milestones in the efforts to achieve a world free from nuclear weapons. The objective of a nuclear-test free world had been pursued by the international community for decades. You, the Member States of the United Nations, delivered to the world what had remained elusive for so many generations before: a credible, effectively verifiable and internationally enforceable prohibition on nuclear testing.

Looking beyond the twentieth anniversary of the Treaty, it is crucial that the focus of the international community must remain on the next step towards the ultimate goal of general and complete disarmament.

My plea is simply this: let’s finish what we started. Let’s keep moving forward in the furtherance of international peace and security.

With the support of you, the Member States, the prevention of nuclear explosions once and for all is within reach.

Thank you.