Thank you to the Secretary-General, and the President of the General Assembly, for your leadership on this important issue.

Ministers and Excellencies, the story I have to tell has been told many times before at the United Nations. And I tell it again, to share our own national experience as a vital lesson.

For much of the world, nuclear weapons and testing is an abstract issue. But for the Marshall Islands, these are not just historical lessons – but contemporary impacts we are still addressing today – and will be addressing long into the future.

It may be well known to many of you that the Marshall Islands was the site of 67 large scale nuclear weapons tests between 1946 and 1958 – an average of 1.6 Hiroshima-sized shots, every day, for 12 years. And while there are only a few nations with whom we share the legacy burden of nuclear weapons exposure – including our close friends in Kazakhstan – we in the Marshall Islands are also unique. These tests in the Marshall Islands were conducted during our time as a UN Trust Territory, and after the initial tests – Marshallese leaders petitioned the United Nations to stop nuclear testing, in 1954, and 1956, and traveled to New York to ask in person. In the very same room where we are today. My own grandmother was part of one of those delegations. The UN responded with two resolutions, numbers 1082 and 1493, which are the only time in which any UN organ has ever explicitly authorized nuclear testing.

The world didn’t listen to our experience then, and that is still a lesson for us all to learn, so many decades later.

These tests produced not only environmental devastation, but dramatic health impacts – death, exposure to cancer, birth defects, and others – which have lasted through generations – from mother to daughter and father to son. And while there have been some measures in place, there are still communities who cannot return home, and compensation claims which remain unaddressed.
We have several possible pathways to reduce nuclear threats, and, if the drive is strong enough, to achieve a universal elimination of nuclear weapons. We agree with others that it would be a major achievement for the UN to declare a world free of nuclear weapons by its 100th anniversary — or sooner.

On the total elimination of nuclear weapons, however, there are evident political realities at play, and total disarmament will not be achieved only because of abstract principles or the well-founded idealism of New York diplomats. So perhaps a question for us to consider is what we best do with our time and effort — we cannot suppose artificial dictates divorced from real-world security scenarios — but neither should we sit back and repeat ourselves yet again, without affecting results.

In this regard, the Marshall Islands welcomes the recent Security Council resolution regarding nuclear testing, the CTBT, and the reduction of nuclear risk. Yet much more remains to be done to not only reduce threats, but achieve total disarmament together with all necessary actors at the table, and to achieve the peace and security that must come with it.

I have not come here today to sell you on any particular one of the measures to reduce nuclear risk — but in light of our national experience, without common agreement by all necessary actors to decide which way forward, we are not making progress.

And that is a failing, with many to blame, which does not honor the burden which the Marshallese people have had to bear for so long.

We can — and we must — all do better.

Thank you and kommol tata.