UNITED NATIONS Conference to negotiate a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination

PREAMBLE by Karina Lester, June 2017

Thank you for this opportunity, Madame President.
My name is Karina Lester; I am a second generation nuclear test survivor from Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjara Aboriginal land in South Australia.

My father Yami Lester was blinded by the British nuclear test conducted at Emu Field on 15 October 1953.

Many of his family and people died, developed eye infections and skin infections, cancers, genetic problems and respiratory problems and many are still suffering today. The emotional, mental and physical suffering is felt by generations – from my grandparents, my father, my generation (siblings), my children and my grandchildren. We are constantly reminded of what has been taken away from us as a family and the suffering we have been through.

Today I represent those Aboriginal people who have died and suffered from those British nuclear tests in the outback of South Australia between 1953 and 1963.

I am here to voice my strong support for the proposal to include a paragraph in the preamble that recognizes the disproportionate impact of nuclear testing on indigenous peoples around the world.

I would like to take this opportunity to read two paragraphs from an important statement that has been prepared for this conference.

It has been endorsed by indigenous groups in many countries, in particular Australia, French Polynesia, the United States and the Marshall Islands.

"We write to remind those drafting this important new treaty about the ongoing harm caused by the use of nuclear weapons, and by more than two thousand nuclear test explosions around the globe. Indigenous communities have borne the brunt of these deadly experiments. Our land, our sea, our communities, and our physical bodies carry this legacy with us now, and for unknown generations to come."

"Our suffering cannot be undone. Our lands can never be restored. Some of our customs will never be revived and will forever remain disrupted. But we hope that, in this new treaty to ban nuclear weapons, governments will at last acknowledge and make reparations for the harm inflicted upon Indigenous peoples, communities, lands and sea."

Your work on this treaty is a historic opportunity towards ensuring that there are no new victims of nuclear weapons.

Thank you.