

## It is time to act and bring the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) into force

A message for the International Day against Nuclear Tests by Tibor Tóth, the Executive Secretary of the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO)

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Despite the worst, the human mind frequently tends to assume the best.

Twenty-one years ago as fragments of the Berlin Wall were being seized by souvenir hunters, a collective sigh of relief went up and the spectre of nuclear Armageddon was suddenly dimmed.

In 2010 we need no reminder that the end of the Cold War, unfortunately, did not bring with it the end of the nuclear threat. Twenty thousand weapons remain in the world's arsenals -- the task of their removal an imperative that must be urgently met.

While too many nuclear weapons remain in so many hands we can't ignore the risk of them falling into the possession of terrorists. Closing the door on their development, once and for all, will be a critical step towards their elimination.

In New York this May, 190 States participating in the five-yearly Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference made a commitment to a world free of nuclear weapons. It builds on a groundswell of opposition to nuclear weapons from all corners of the globe.

But if we are finally to wrestle the nuclear beast to the ground, such concern needs to be directed into political will and concrete action. This is not a Quixotic venture and naysayers who contend that nuclear disarmament is an illusion that cannot be fulfilled fly in the face of history.

On 29 August we are reminded that 19 years ago a chapter opened and led to the dismantlement of the world's fourth largest nuclear arsenal and the rejection by its host of its nuclear defenses.

Last year the United Nations General Assembly unanimously accepted a proposal from Kazakhstan to declare 29 August the International Day against Nuclear Tests.

It was on 29 August 1949 that the Soviet Union detonated its first nuclear device, "First Lightning", at the Semipalatinsk test range in Kazakhstan and the nuclear arms race began. The event came four years after the explosion of the first nuclear bomb by the United States in 1945.

Forty-two years later, after the exploding of over 450 nuclear bombs, President Nursultan Nazarbayev shut down on 29 August 1991 the Semipalatinsk site. A decade and a half later Kazakhstan's nuclear inheritance from the breakup of the Soviet Union had become part of history.

Fourteen-hundred nuclear warheads, intercontinental ballistic missiles, cruise missiles and heavy bombers were returned to Russia for disposal under the START 1 Treaty. Weapons grade uranium was down blended into commercial reactor fuel and weaponizable plutonium was also safely disposed of. Reactors that had provided weapons material were de-commissioned. The Semipalatinsk test site, also known as the Polygon, was spiked.

From being one of the world's most potent nuclear armed nations, Kazakhstan acceded to the NPT in 1994 as a non-nuclear weapon State. In 1996, four days after the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) opened for signature, it was signed by Kazakhstan.

Kazakhstan's nuclear disarmament also established that States can abdicate their nuclear crowns without it impinging on their security. Belarus, South Africa and Ukraine had also possessed nuclear weapons and renounced their nuclear arsenals, thus setting the same example.

Nearly two decades after President Nazarbayev's bold step to close the Semipalatinsk test site, I share his view that now is the time for the nine States whose ratification of the CTBT will bring it into force to show the political will and fully endorse it.

The desire to pursue a nuclear-weapon-free world is not in short measure but we need to observe 29 August as a time to act and not to wait.

The final investment by the few States that remain outside of the Treaty – 182 have signed it of whom 153 have also ratified -- will put an end to nuclear explosions once and for all. It's axiomatic that without being able to test nuclear weapons, a State seeking to develop them will have its hands tied.

Ending nuclear explosions is a goal on the road to nuclear disarmament that must be reached.

Kazakhstan offers a clear example for the rest of the world of how nuclear disarmament can be undertaken. Its commitment to a nuclear-weapon-free world is also reflected in its role in the establishment of the Central Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone.

I congratulate President Nazarbayev and Kazakhstan on their achievements and acknowledge that the echo of Semipalatinsk from this 29 August onwards is very important for us all to hear.