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**Statement by Dr Naledi Pandor, Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of South Africa on the occasion of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Article XIV Conference, 23 September 2021**

Your Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates

South Africa welcomes the convening of the Article XIV Conference to encourage ratification and universalisation of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). This Conference is as an opportunity for the international community to highlight the dangers and threats posed to international peace and security by nuclear weapons and tests. It also allows us an opportunity to pay tribute to those who have been victims of the use of nuclear weapons. We believe that the Conference should be part of sustained and redoubled efforts to encourage the signing and ratification of the Treaty.

The importance South Africa attaches to the CTBT and its objectives has been demonstrated by the fact that we were one of the first countries to sign and ratify the Treaty and we continue to strongly support the entry into force of the Treaty. We are, therefore, honoured to be presiding over this Conference along with Italy. We commend Algeria and Germany for their sterling efforts as Co-Presidents of the previous conference.

Excellencies,

We are also pleased to preside over the Conference as we commemorate the 25th Anniversary of the opening for signature of the Treaty in 1996. Against this backdrop, we should bear in mind and highlight the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of a nuclear weapon detonation, whether by accident or design and in any environment.

As we commemorate this day, it is appropriate to reflect on the current challenges and opportunities facing the realisation and strengthening of the global norm against nuclear tests and nuclear disarmament in general.

This challenge is heightened by the escalating vertical advancement and stockpiling, and horizontal spread of the development of nuclear arsenals and their means of delivery perpetuated by those that possess them. South Africa therefore urges the Nuclear Weapon States and those that possess these horrific weapons to make urgent progress towards the achievement of the total elimination of nuclear weapons.

South African believes that today’s commemoration should continue to remind us of the urgency of the entry-into-force and universalisation of the CTBT as a cornerstone of our collective endeavours to prevent both vertical and horizontal proliferation of nuclear weapons and, as a solid foundation for the achievement of a world free of nuclear weapons. It is in this context, that my country shares the concern expressed about the lack of progress in the ratification of the CTBT, in particular by the 8 remaining Annex II States. On a positive note, we welcome the ratifications of the Treaty by Zimbabwe, Comoros and Cuba since the last Conference in 2019.

The failure to bring the CTBT into force will only weaken and undermine the nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament machinery, and become an increasingly challenging obstacle to the international community’s quest for a world free from the threat of nuclear weapon devastation. We have repeatedly expressed our view that until entry into force of the CTBT, it is essential that countries continue to observe a moratorium on any nuclear explosions. However, such moratorium should not seek to become a viable long-term replacement for the legally binding commitment of States Signatories to the CTBT upon entry into force.

South Africa, therefore, resolves to continue its active role in the work of the CTBTO, both from a technical and political perspective. This includes support for the concrete actionable steps towards early entry into force and universalisation of the Treaty, such as using avenues to encourage further signature and ratification as well as outreach initiatives. Furthermore, South Africa has nominated our very own Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Mr Alvin Botes, to serve as part of the Group of Eminent Persons supporting and complementing efforts to promote the Treaty’s entry into force, as well as reinvigorating international endeavours to achieve this goal. We also look forward to working with the Executive Secretary of the CTBTO, Dr Robert Floyd, who we are glad to share this platform with today and support his work going forward.

I thank you.