



In the spotlight

H.E. Alexander Downer, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia

Q: *The adoption of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) in September 1996 by the United Nations General Assembly marked the culmination of decades of international efforts to arrive at a complete ban on nuclear testing.*

Australia has made significant contributions to this achievement. Could you explain your personal efforts and the special historic role of Australia regarding the CTBT? Why is the CTBT so important for nuclear non-proliferation?

A: Preventing the further spread of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and achieving their ultimate elimination are long-standing priorities for Australia. Successive Australian governments have recognized that more States acquiring WMD could threaten Australian, regional and global security.

Australia is a strong supporter of the major WMD treaties and we have built up over many years a strong reputation as an energetic and practical contributor on non-proliferation and disarmament issues. A ban on nuclear testing has long held a special importance for us. Australia was one of the first non-nuclear-weapon States to ratify the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty which was a major step towards the CTBT.

The text used as the basis for the CTBT negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament (CD) in Geneva was in large part based on elements Australia tabled in 1994. When the CTBT could not overcome the final hurdle of being adopted in the CD, I led international action in taking the Treaty to the United Nations in New York in 1996, where an overwhelming majority of countries adopted it.

As I said in my address to the 2005 Conference on Facilitating the Entry into Force of the CTBT (Article XIV Conference), this was one of my earliest

experiences as Foreign Minister of Australia and one that I am very proud of.

Australia has over many years invested considerable effort in the development

discussed with Member States ways and means to promote the entry into force of the Treaty. What were the main issues that were brought up by the Member States?

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and maintenance of global WMD non-proliferation and disarmament treaties, their verification mechanisms and various bilateral, regional and multilateral measures supporting the main treaties. Neither these nor the other elements of the global non-proliferation and disarmament architecture stand alone. Rather they comprise a system of interlocking and mutually reinforcing parts. The CTBT is a vital component of this system. As the Final Declaration of the 2005 Article XIV Conference clearly says, “constraining the development and qualitative improvement of nuclear weapons and ending the development of advanced new types of nuclear weapons constitutes an effective measure of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation”.

Q: *Nine years after its opening for signature, the CTBT is firmly entrenched in its path towards achieving universal adherence, but it is still not in force.*

As the President of the 2005 Conference on Facilitating the Entry into Force of the CTBT, which took place from 21 to 23 September in New York, you

A: There is a very real sense of frustration felt by the vast majority of countries which have signed and ratified the Treaty that its entry into force is not closer. One hundred and seventy-six State Signatories and 126 Ratifiers is a clear demonstration of near universal support for the CTBT.

While Annex 2 countries have a special responsibility, given the entry into force requirements of the Treaty, all countries have an obligation both to their own citizens and the international community to ratify the Treaty. Each and every ratification moves the CTBT closer to universality and strengthens the normative value of the test ban.

Q: *The rather complicated entry into force clause of the Treaty requires the ratification by the 44 States listed in its Annex 2. Thirty-three of them have ratified the CTBT so far.*

In your statement at the Article XIV Conference you said that you had heard many reasons why the eleven remaining countries had not ratified the Treaty, but the



time for excuses was past and "it is time for them to act".

What measures in the Final Declaration of the 2005 Conference are designed to further signature and ratification of the Treaty by the concerned eleven States?

A: There is very strong focus on the eleven remaining Annex 2 countries whose signature is required to trigger entry into force. A number of those countries appear to have no particular policy reason for not ratifying the Treaty and we could reasonably expect that, with the continued encouragement and assistance of other States, they ought to be able to give the Treaty the priority it deserves and finalize their ratification processes.

A number of countries have said they do not support the Treaty or that there are complicating factors which prevent them from ratifying at present. I have heard a lot of excuses, but I have yet to hear a convincing argument against the CTBT. None of the Member States at the Article XIV Conference was in any doubt about the CTBT's capacity to contribute to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. As we all know, the proliferation danger is now even more acute, given the known interest of terrorists in acquiring weapons of mass destruction.

All of the measures contained in the Final Declaration have an application to the remaining Annex 2 countries. I would like to make particular note of the Special Representative, Ambassador Ramaker. He has already played a valuable role in promoting ratification with senior political figures in a number of countries, including some listed in Annex 2. As the coordinating-State from 2005 to 2007, Australia is pleased to have the support of Ambassador Ramaker in promoting the entry into force of the CTBT. We should

not forget that he speaks on behalf of 126 Ratifier States.

Q: *In the previous Article XIV Conferences Member States have proposed measures to facilitate ratification of the Treaty such as urging officials of Ratifier States to raise CTBT ratification at meetings with counterparts in non-ratifying States.*

What other ideas are discussed among Member States to promote early entry into force of the CTBT?

A: What is very clear is that political impetus is often necessary to raise the profile and priority of issues such as the CTBT, particularly with countries which may not see any immediate benefit or who mistakenly think that their ratification won't make any difference. Ratifiers have a special responsibility to provide their friends and neighbours with the help and assistance they need to ratify the Treaty and implement its provisions. Often ratification will require only the establishment of a legislative framework and limited ongoing activities. Australia for obvious geographical reasons has a special focus on assisting countries in the South Pacific region. We hope that other Ratifiers will assist in their regions.

Q: *There is an emerging international consensus that the CTBT is vital because it contributes to national and international security by creating a climate within which a stop to nuclear test explosions is now regarded by many as a norm.*

What developments in the future role of the Treaty do you see at this stage?

A: We should never forget that the primary purpose of the Treaty's verification regime is the detection of nuclear explosions. What is also clear is the possibility that, without detracting from its verification function, the data collected by the CTBTO could make a contribution to

disaster alert systems. Testing is continuing to see if CTBTO data can be used for tsunami warning, including the Australian Tsunami Warning System. We ought to continue to look for ways that civil and scientific benefits can be broadly shared by the international community. ■

Biographical note



His Excellency Mr Alexander Downer, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia, presided over the 2005 Article XIV Conference.

Since becoming Minister for Foreign Affairs in 1996, Mr Downer has overseen a range of important developments on the international stage. Prior to his current position, Mr Downer served as Shadow Minister in a number of portfolios, including Treasurer, Defence, Trade and Trade Negotiations, Housing and Small Business, and Arts, Heritage and Environment. He also held various senior Parliamentary positions.

Mr Downer served as Executive Director of the Australian Chamber of Commerce from 1983 to 1984. Prior to that, from 1982 to 1983, he was a Political Adviser to the former Australian Prime Minister, the Hon. Malcolm Fraser.

From 1976 to 1982, Mr Downer served as a diplomat in the Department of Foreign Affairs. He also worked as an Economist at the Bank of New South Wales from 1975 to 1976. ■