

VOICES

The end of nuclear testing is within our reach

BY GEORGINA TE HEUHEU,
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The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) is a vital element in today's multilateral framework for nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. Its entry into force would be a major step towards a world free of nuclear weapons – which must be our ultimate destination. But this year is the fifteenth since the Treaty was opened for signature, and it is yet to enter into force.

New Zealand has always been a strong advocate of the Treaty. New Zealand signed the Treaty just three days after it was opened for signature on 27 September 1996 and each year in the United Nations General Assembly takes turns with Australia and Mexico to run a resolution in support of the Treaty. New Zealand also hosts six monitoring stations which form part of the verification system on its territory, as well as one of ten currently certified radionuclide laboratories.

NEW ZEALAND'S DECADES-LONG STRUGGLE TO MAKE THE WORLD A SAFER PLACE

These actions are consistent with New Zealand's long history of opposing nuclear weapons and nuclear testing.

New Zealanders have worked for decades for the complete cessation of nuclear testing around the world. Since the 1950s, when nuclear weapons first started being tested in our region, successive New Zealand governments have contributed to global and regional efforts to stop testing. Those efforts have included taking direct action, such as the dispatching of New Zealand warships to the testing grounds of the Pacific, and pursuing more traditional diplomatic and legal initiatives.

In the five decades following World War II, at least 285 atmospheric and underground tests were carried out in the Pacific. Although far from the world's heavily populated metropolitan regions, the chosen sites were not empty. They were inhabited by small and vulnerable communities, some of which were exposed to environmental and health effects that

remain to this day. Nuclear testing in the Pacific strengthened New Zealand's resolve that nuclear weapons provided no solution to the problems of the world and that they had no place in our region. It inspired the creation of the South Pacific Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone by the Treaty of Rarotonga in 1985, and New Zealand's own nuclear-free legislation in 1987, the New Zealand Nuclear Free Zone, Disarmament and Arms Control Act, both of which occupy a special place in our national identity.

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The Licorne test, Moruroa Atoll, southern Pacific Ocean, 3 July 1970. AFP Getty Images.

»Fifteen years after the CTBT's negotiation, there can no longer be any arguments that a global ban on nuclear testing is not feasible or cannot be verified.«

negotiation of the CTBT in 1996 was a very positive step in that direction. At the heart of the Treaty is the recognition that banning nuclear tests effectively places a qualitative cap on the development and improvement of nuclear weapons. In short, an effective and verifiable CTBT is an essential step on the road to a nuclear-weapon-free world.

While the opening of the CTBT for signature in September 1996 was the culmination of many years of technical, scientific and diplomatic work, the next two challenges – pulling together the necessary ratifications for entry into force and building the Treaty's verification system – were only just beginning.

Substantial progress has been made on both goals. The CTBT has now been signed by 182 States and ratified by 153. Approximately 85 percent of the International Monitoring System (IMS) stations have been installed, of which almost 80 percent have been certified and are fully operational. The International Data Centre continues to provide Member States with essential products (such as raw data and data analysis results) and services using an ever-increasing stream of data from the IMS. Work is also underway to develop the necessary framework for the final verification measure included in the Treaty, an on-site inspection (OSI).

The global progress that has been made reflects a near-universal recognition and acceptance of the objectives of the Treaty, and has contributed to the global moratorium on nuclear testing. But it is not enough. As we have seen as recently as 2009 when North Korea conducted a nuclear test, a norm against nuclear testing which has a moral rather than a legal force cannot be relied upon

to prevent a breach, and a verification regime that is not complete cannot provide an adequate response.

PROMOTING THE CTBT'S ENTRY INTO FORCE

There have been many initiatives since 1996 to promote the entry into force of the Treaty, including the biennial Article XIV (Entry into Force) conferences and the annual resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly. The CTBT also features prominently on the agenda of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conferences, with the 2010 Conference reaffirming the essential role of the Treaty within the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime. And with the help of the Government of Kazakhstan, 2010 also saw the inauguration of an international day against nuclear testing on 29 August.

These initiatives have had some success. The number of ratifications continues to grow, with recent additions from the Pacific region such as the Marshall Islands and Papua New Guinea further contributing to the universalization of the Treaty. Positive signals from among the remaining Annex II States are also significant, and New Zealand warmly welcomes the public commitments from Indonesia and the United States to move forward on ratification.

There can, however, be no substitute for entry into force of the Treaty and for the completion of the verification regime. Fifteen years after the CTBT's negotiation, there can no longer be any arguments that a global ban on nuclear testing is not feasible or cannot be verified. If we – as individual countries and as an international community – are serious

IMPORTANCE OF A UNIVERSAL AND VERIFIABLE BAN ON NUCLEAR TESTS

Like many other countries, however, New Zealand was convinced that the most effective way to achieve an end to nuclear testing would be through a universal and verifiable global ban. The



Map showing the South Pacific Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone. Courtesy of Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI).

CTBT MEMBERSHIP OFFERS A NUMBER OF ADDITIONAL BENEFITS

The benefits to States from CTBT membership are far greater than the costs. The products of the IMS network are an increasingly important global scientific resource, as shown in particular by the work now being done in the field of tsunami early warnings. In addition, all States hosting monitoring stations own and operate those stations and receive technical and financial assistance to ensure their continued operation. For many States, the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO) provides capacity building assistance through technical workshops and training.

However, what New Zealand values most about being part of the CTBT is contributing to the movement towards a great global good: the end of nuclear testing for all time. This is an essential step towards the ultimate goal of eliminating nuclear weapons and the threat they pose to life on earth. New Zealand would like to see the CTBT enter into force sooner rather than later and calls on all States yet to sign and ratify the Treaty to do so without further delay.

about ending nuclear testing and paving the way towards a nuclear-weapon-free world, there can be no better way of demonstrating our commitment to that ideal than by signing and ratifying the CTBT and seeing it enter into force.

STATES THAT HAVE NOT YET SIGNED OR RATIFIED THE CTBT SHOULD DO SO IMMEDIATELY

In this regard the nine remaining Annex 2 States bear a special responsibility for the CTBT's entry into force. At the same time that New Zealand looks to those States to take immediate steps to sign and ratify the Treaty, we will take every opportunity

to encourage other remaining States, including those in the Pacific, to ratify the Treaty, and support the efforts of those moving towards this goal.

We, the international community, must also continue to work collectively towards a verification regime to monitor Treaty compliance that will be operational at entry into force. This will require the support of all Member States. Adequate resources and political support are also indispensable, whether in the form of technical expertise, budgetary contributions or the construction of monitoring stations.



Air sampler at radionuclide station RN47, Kaitaia, New Zealand

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

GEORGINA TE HEUHEU

is New Zealand's Minister for Disarmament and Arms Control, Minister for Courts, Minister of Pacific Island Affairs and Associate Minister of Maori Affairs. Mrs te Heuheu was the first Maori woman to be admitted to the High Court of New Zealand as a Barrister and Solicitor. She went on to practise law in Wellington and Rotorua before entering Parliament in 1996. She became only the second Maori woman appointed to a New Zealand Cabinet in 1998. From 1998 to 1999, Mrs te Heuheu was New Zealand's Minister for Courts, Minister of Women's Affairs, Associate Minister for Treaty of Waitangi Negotiations and Associate Minister of Health.