Cementing the trend away from nuclear weapons

BY NOBUYASU ABE

It has been more than 18 years since I sat at a strategy session hosted by the then Australian UN Ambassador, Richard Butler, in New York in 1996 to move the draft Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) for adoption in the General Assembly. Since then 183 countries have signed and 164 have ratified the CTBT but it has yet to enter into force because eight countries whose ratification is required have not yet done so. We need to bring the Treaty into force as soon as possible to put the world firmly on the road towards the elimination of nuclear weapons, to prevent the proliferation of such weapons until then, and to drastically inhibit the upgrading of nuclear weapons by those who already have them. The Treaty is a very good instrument for these purposes and that’s exactly the reason why the remaining countries have not ratified.

Some analysts argue that these eight countries, i.e. China, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea), Egypt, India, Iran, Israel, Pakistan and the United States, are an intransigent group and that it is virtually impossible to convince them to ratify. But in fact, none of them, except North Korea, has objected to the Treaty outright. All but India, Pakistan and North Korea have signed the CTBT, theoretically expressing their intention to become parties to the Treaty. India has stated that it would not stand in the way of the entry into force of the Treaty. Pakistan has even indicated it is ready to join the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) if India does. If so, why not the CTBT?

While we work on the non-ratifiers, there are many things that can be done.

1. Complete the International Monitoring System (IMS), composed of 337 seismic, infrasound, hydroacoustic and radionuclide monitoring facilities, of which around 85% are already operational. And ensure that on-site inspection capabilities are fully developed upon entry into force. With the verification regime fully established, this will help mount the pressure on anybody who might try to conduct a clandestine nuclear test as it will definitely be detected and condemned.

2. Ensure that the declared moratoria on nuclear testing remain in place until the CTBT enters into force. The U.S., Russia, Britain, France, China, India, and Pakistan have declared moratoria on nuclear testing in varying degrees. It is only North Korea that has tested since 1998, for which it has been condemned by the UN Security Council through resolutions which have imposed sanctions on the country. The resolutions must be enforced.

3. CTBTO Member States should make their assessed contributions in full, even before the CTBT has entered into force. Any additional voluntary contributions would also be greatly welcomed.

4. Make use of the data available from the IMS for civil and scientific purposes such as for human welfare. While carrying out the difficult task of detecting remote clandestine nuclear tests, IMS stations also produce high quality precision data about the Earth’s activities, for example. The CTBTO has already started making its seismic data available to international tsunami warning networks. Radionuclide data from the Takasaki monitoring station in Japan provided to people in and around Japan after the Fukushima nuclear accident in March 2011 proved to be both reliable and of high quality. These activities will help win the support of people around the world for the maintenance of the IMS.

5. Member States might also consider establishing additional monitoring stations in low-latitude areas where the mandated monitoring stations are sparse.

Traditionally, countries conducted tests in their own territories or outside under certain international arrangements. In the future, rogue States or non-State actors might conduct tests in failing States or in areas where there are fewer monitoring stations.

[1] The Resolution establishing the Preparatory Commission states in paragraph 5(a) that the costs of the CTBT and its activities shall be met annually by all States Signatories, in accordance with the UN scale of assessment.