I have seen the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO) grow from the very beginning because I had the privilege to represent Germany when the CTBT was being negotiated in Geneva from 1994 to 1996. I was subsequently elected the first Executive Secretary of the new organization. I therefore follow with great interest and empathy the CTBTO’s development under my successors, Tibor Tóth and Lassina Zerbo.

We began in 1997 with a handful of people and technical assistance provided by other international organizations at the Vienna International Centre. The preparatory work and help from the scientific community helped us make quick progress. From the beginning we tried to be modest in terms of personnel and financial resources. Member States gave us all the necessary political and financial support which meant that we were recognized as a legitimate partner by States and international organizations.

Since its inception, the CTBTO has established a rapidly growing network of monitoring stations, as foreseen in the Treaty. It was already possible in 1998 to monitor the nuclear explosions in India and Pakistan. The more recent explosions in North Korea were detected with reliability and precision. The verification system has now developed in such a way that nobody could detonate a nuclear device and evade detection. We owe this success to a competent and highly motivated staff who work for an organization that has a higher percentage of women than most of its international counterparts.

While the system’s primary purpose is to detect nuclear explosions, the monitoring data – which belong to Member States – can also offer civil and scientific benefits such as providing valuable information for tsunami warnings. Even some countries that haven’t yet signed the Treaty benefit from CTBTO data through their cooperation with other organizations on tsunami warnings. And monitoring the atmosphere can, for example, help warn air traffic controllers of ash from volcanic eruptions.

Under the able leadership of Lassina Zerbo, the development of the verification regime has reached its final stage. Even on-site inspection capabilities’ have been fully developed and were tested successfully during the Integrated Field Exercise 2014 in Jordan.

The status of signatures and ratifications indicates the worldwide support for an end to nuclear testing: with 183 signatures, there are only 13 States which have not yet signed. And 164 States have ratified. The problem is that the Treaty has not yet entered into force. The reason for this is a rather complicated formula we agreed on during the final phase of CTBT negotiations. Generally, a certain number of ratifications are sufficient for entry into force. In the case of the CTBT, however, 44 States with nuclear capabilities must ratify. Of these, 36 have already ratified but eight have not; three of them have not even signed.

When Lassina Zerbo was elected Executive Secretary he proposed the creation of a Group of Eminent Persons to help solve this problem. States agreed and a group of around 20 personalities from politics, science, diplomacy and administration came together. The first meeting took place in September 2013. Work was divided into three groups of countries. Members developed different methods to influence the governments of the eight remaining countries. Articles and letters have been written, and meetings have been held with governments, politicians and members of civil society. Recently, I’ve been able to talk to governments and civil society in India and Pakistan with the financial and logistical assistance of the German Foreign Ministry. This endeavour must go on and it will go on.

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WOLFGANG HOFFMANN

served as the first Executive Secretary of the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization from March 1997 until August 2005. Prior to this he was the German Ambassador to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva from 1993 to 1997, where negotiations for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty took place between 1994 and 1996. A lawyer by profession, He entered the German Foreign Service in 1965 where he held different positions, especially in the multilateral field.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

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GROUP OF EMINENT PERSONS (GEM)