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A TOTAL BAN ON NUCLEAR WEAPON TESTS

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The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed August 29 as the International Day Against Nuclear Weapons, which is observed at the headquarters of the Organization and in many countries with events whose main focus is the promotion of the full entry into force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

Adopted in 1996, the CTBT has 196 signatory States. Ratification by 44 countries nominally specified in its text is necessary for its entry into force. Eight among those have not yet ratified: China, DPRK, Egypt, United States, India, Iran, Israel and Pakistan. Brazil, one of those 44 States, was among the first to sign the Treaty and the National Congress completed the ratification process in 1998.

Although during the past decade States possessing nuclear-weapons – with the exception of the DPRK – have voluntarily abstained from carrying out new tests with atomic explosives the international community deems essential that the prohibition contained in the CTBT becomes a legally binding norm for all States. Its entry into force would represent a clear signal that the world has not abandoned its efforts to prevent the development of nuclear armament. Allowing the Treaty to remain devoid of legally binding authority carries the risk of a new cycle in the nuclear arms race.

Once in force, the CTBT will provide the indispensable legal basis for verification of compliance with the obligations assumed by States, through a highly sophisticated system of detection to a large extent already in place, including a worldwide monitoring network that covers the entire planet and is able to distinguish between natural seismic movements and those resulting from underground nuclear explosions. This network has been utilized recently to give early warning to populations exposed to the danger of tsunamis from earthquakes and volcanic eruptions.

The eight States whose ratification is necessary for the Treaty to achieve full force are responsible before the international community for the weakening of the ensemble of norms adopted during the last decades in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation. All efforts should be made to convince those that did not yet ratify the Treaty to do so forthwith. Ratification by those nations would provide greater strength and credibility to the commitment, so often expressed by them, to the achievement of a world free of nuclear weapons.

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