

Science and Diplomacy for Peace and Security: the CTBT at 20

Symposium Keynote Address

Lassina Zerbo
Executive Secretary

25 January 2016

Excellencies,
Distinguished Speakers and Panellists,
Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Introduction

It is a pleasure to speak to you this morning and to formally welcome you all to the Symposium. I had hoped to be here a little earlier, but unfortunately airline schedules did not allow it. I have just returned from Burkina Faso, which as you know was hit by a terrorist attack a little over a week ago.

This was another in a series of terrible events the world over that really challenge our thinking on “peace and security”. They stand in stark contrast to what we are working to achieve here using the tools of science and diplomacy.

When I decided to run for the position of Executive Secretary, I did so because I believed in the CTBT as one of the greatest examples of how people and nations came together to solve one of the greatest threats we face. I still passionately believe this.

The Treaty, together with its verification regime, is a constructive endeavour of the highest order. It is the exact opposite of these movements that attempt to rip apart the bonds that bind us all together.

Twentieth Anniversary

The next two weeks brings into focus what a monumental accomplishment it was to have the CTBT opened for signature twenty years ago.

I have to choose my words carefully when I speak about this twentieth anniversary. I have been determined for some time to use 2016 as an opportunity to reflect upon the Treaty, on the real achievements made and the challenges that remain.

But we cannot really characterize this anniversary as a cause for celebration. Until such time as it enters into force, the CTBT is unfinished business. Unless we finish what we started, there is a risk that we will lose twenty years of hard work and fifty to sixty years of negotiations on a world without nuclear testing.

So the twentieth anniversary is a time for reflection. And hopefully that reflection will bring about a time for action. This Symposium starts the process, and we have exciting plans for the rest of the year, including a high-level event to be held in a few months' time.

DPRK test / CTBT verification / engagement

In December last year, I told an audience of members of esteemed think-tanks and government institutions to put aside even 30 seconds a day in 2016 to think about the CTBT. Then something happened in early January that caused a lot of people to think about nuclear testing more deeply than they might have expected.

You know what I'm talking about of course. In the early morning of Wednesday 6 January – it was just after 02.30 hours Vienna time – stations of the International Monitoring System detected unusual seismic activity in North Korea. Shortly afterwards the DPRK announced that a nuclear test had been conducted.

We went on to provide our Member States with automated and reviewed data on the event well within the short timelines provided for by the Treaty. We held a briefing on the initial data just hours after the event, and a full meeting of the Preparatory Commission, our governing body, was held the following day. Meanwhile, condemnation of the announced nuclear test resounded throughout the world. The Security Council met to discuss steps to take.

In a roundabout way, you could say that this anniversary year got off to a rather high-profile start.

Let's just remind ourselves how different things would be if the CTBT had not been opened for signature in 1996. We would have no global system for monitoring and detecting signs of nuclear explosions, and no means of transmitting the relevant data in a timely and non-discriminatory manner. The international community would simply not be empowered to draw conclusions on the nature of an event.

This empowerment to use CTBT data is one of the most exciting and innovative elements of what we do. We are an organization at the forefront of technology, linking academia with governmental institutions and engaging with countries throughout the world to build capacity on technical, legal and policy-related aspects of the Treaty regime.

That makes it all the more important to hold a Symposium such as this, which builds on the strong tradition of past CTBT Courses and Science and Technology conferences. One of our key aims is to connect with the next generation of experts. And I'm very happy that so many students, young researchers, and others at the start of their careers are here with us for the Symposium or following it online.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Symposium

The programme before you is a very rich one. It covers the political origins of the Treaty, the scientific genesis and future of the verification regime, and the role of the CTBT in international peace and security. It also brings civil society and the media to the forefront.

I am especially excited about the "hands-on" nature of the Symposium. In addition to lively dialogue with experts, we are also giving participants the opportunity to conduct an Executive Council simulation, with a realistic scenario leading to deliberations on a possible on-site inspection. We will also be handing things over to our participants next week, and asking them to come up with practical options and solutions for progress on entry into force.

This morning we have the benefit of a keynote address from Dr David Strangway, President Emeritus of the University of British Columbia. Mr Joseph Cirincione, President of the Ploughshares Fund, unfortunately could not be present due to the major snow storm affecting the East Coast of the United States, but is able to make a virtual appearance by video-conference. And tomorrow Dr Paul Richards, Special Research Scientist at Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory at Columbia University will give another key note talk. All three are excellent advocates for the Treaty and truly bring alive the science-diplomacy nexus that is at the heart of what we do.

I also wish to acknowledge the welcoming remarks from Ambassador Angell-Hansen of Norway. Norway, as well as the European Union, have been great supporters of our educational and capacity-building activities over the years.

And of course I wish to thank Ambassador Istrate of Romania, Chair of the Preparatory Commission, for his words and for all he has done in preparation for the twentieth anniversary.

There are many interesting panels and debates coming up, with so many great speakers. You will forgive me if I don't mention everyone by name, but all are valued members of the CTBT community.

We are lucky to welcome some of the negotiators of the Treaty, along with the Chair of the negotiations in 1996, for a panel immediately following this opening session. One of the negotiators I

must mention by name: Ambassador Hoffmann. His presence here, along with that of Ambassador Tóth, means that all former and current Executive Secretaries of the CTBTO are together to mark twenty years since it all began.

I also wish to welcome members of the Group of Eminent Persons for the CTBT, among them Ambassador Abe, Ambassador Sha and Ms Angela Kane, all of whom have a wealth of experience in disarmament and non-proliferation issues.

And finally, on the last day of the Symposium, Thursday 4 February, we are honoured to have a closing keynote courtesy of Lord Des Browne. In addition to being a GEM member and Vice-Chairman of the Nuclear Threat Initiative, Des is a former UK Secretary of State for Defence. I very much hope that you will all be here for what will undoubtedly be a thought-provoking and stimulating address.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Acting on CTBT entry into force

Even before entry into force, the CTBT has all but put a stop to nuclear testing. Many States condemned the DPRK's fourth announced test as breaking with a de facto norm against testing. While this demonstrates that the Treaty is as important as ever, it is also a wake-up call to finally bring it into force.

The Treaty has the support of 183 States Signatories, 164 of which have ratified it. This is an excellent sign-up rate by most standards. But entry into force will follow only when 44 listed countries complete their ratification procedures. We still have 8 to go. 5 of those have signed but not ratified. What we need now is for real leadership from those countries.

People often ask me about the prospects for ratification in one country or another. No doubt we will hear a lot about this from the experts here. The assumption is often that we must wait for one country to set the dominos tumbling. I can't say I agree. I don't believe that there is one 800lb gorilla and seven 250lb gorillas. No country needs to wait. As far as CTBT entry into force is concerned, all the remaining countries are the same.

There are strong reasons for each of the eight to help finish what we started. And there are models we can follow to bring us to that goal. Take the Iran deal. It took not only almost two years of talks, but many years of hard work, to reach what is an historical agreement.

The Iran deal shows that multilateral collaboration can effectively overcome difficult problems. Many of the key players in the Iran deal – such as EU High Representative Mogherini – are now talking

about CTBT entry into force as the next big goal in disarmament and non-proliferation, which can be achieved with a similar approach. Let's make her words a reality.

It is important to seize opportunities and move forward when the time is right. In Africa we sit around the baobab tree and sort out our issues. Now is the time to bring everyone under that baobab tree and discuss the CTBT.

I've heard enough pessimistic voices. The impossible can become possible. Steps can be taken. Building blocks can be laid down. One opportunity is to explore a Nuclear Test Free Zone in the Middle East. By signing the Treaty, Egypt, Iran and Israel have already said no to testing. Let's turn that no into a never.

Despite its fourth announced nuclear test, engagement with North Korea should not be seen as out of reach. New channels that may foster incremental change in the DPRK can be explored. I believe that the CTBT can be a part of such engagement. I have consistently said that I do not believe in isolation but rather in dialogue.

Other initiatives

Fatigue with existing structures in non-proliferation and disarmament is a real danger to making progress. I understand the disappointment that many feel with the NPT Review Process. And it is fascinating to see new approaches emerge, such as an analysis based on humanitarian concerns. Some have now suggested a nuclear weapon convention. But we should bear in mind that we do not yet have even a nuclear-test free world. It is hard to imagine progress until that is achieved.

I have said it before, and I will say it again. Acting on the CTBT can be 'disruptive' in only the positive sense of the word. It would transform bilateral and multilateral relationships, build confidence regionally and globally, and help unlock a range of pending issues in non-proliferation and disarmament.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Conclusion

Let me finish by wishing you all a productive and inspiring Symposium. We are all part of a learning circle. With well in excess of 400 participants from educational institutions, non-governmental organizations, National Data Centres, and government ministries from all regions, we all have a lot to learn from each other.

A number of you are at the start of your careers, and I very much hope that determined and focused youth engagement on CTBT issues will be one of the strongest outcomes of the twentieth anniversary. We need the energy and enthusiasm of the next generation to ensure that, in the not too distant future, we all meet here again to celebrate the first of many happy anniversaries of the Treaty's entry into force.

Thank you.