

**Opening remarks by the Executive Secretary
Preparatory Commission for the
Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization**

Dr Lassina Zerbo

**2018 CTBTO GEM – Youth International Conference
*Remembering the Past, Looking to the Future***

Astana

29 August 2018

My dear friend HE Mr Kairat Abdrakhmanov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan,
HE Mr Kanat Bozumbaev, Minister of Energy of Kazakhstan,

Dear GEM Members,

Dear Youth group members,

Dear Karipbek Kuyukov, Ambassador of ATOM Project,

Dear Friends,

It is my pleasure to be part of this 2018 CTBTO GEM and Youth International Conference here in Kazakhstan.

Let me first of all express my full-hearted gratitude to the Government of Kazakhstan for its unwavering support of the Treaty and for ensuring the success of this event.

Today is 29 August. Almost 70 years ago, on 29 August 1949, the Soviet Union detonated its first nuclear explosive device at the Semipalatinsk test site. Over the next forty years, 456 nuclear explosive tests were conducted at Semipalatinsk, with dire consequences both for the people and for their environment. This experience has given Kazakhstan an added sense of purpose and responsibility pushing for a total ban on nuclear tests.

On 29 August 1991, President Nazarbayev permanently closed the Semipalatinsk Nuclear Test Site. Leading by example, Kazakhstan also voluntarily renounced the fourth largest nuclear arsenal in the world.

Today, equally thanks to Kazakhstan, 29 August marks the International Day against Nuclear Tests. But let me assure you. CTBTO works hard to make sure that every day is a day against nuclear tests.

The Conference that brings us here today is unique. As highlighted by President Nazarbayev, the effects of nuclear weapons and nuclear testing cannot be contained in either time or space. They are a global issue which requires global and intergenerational cooperation.

Keeping this in mind, this Conference brings together for the first time the CTBTO Group of Eminent Persons and the CTBTO Youth Group. Together, these groups will discuss how to join their forces to advance the entry into force of the CTBT and ensure a more inclusive global security architecture.

I am especially grateful to the members of the Group of Eminent Persons for taking their time to join us here today, and for their openness towards our new initiatives.

Let me also thank the members of the Youth Group who have here today representatives of 6 out of the 8 Annex 2 States that have not yet either signed or ratified the CTBTO and whose ratification is needed for the Treaty to enter into force.

And, of course, the Kazakhstani and international experts, activists and scholars, joining us today.

Today, we will touch upon the burning issues of the day such as the 2019 Preparatory Committee for the 2020 Review Conference of the NPT, or the situation on the Korean Peninsula. I returned from the region last week with an even stronger conviction that the international community should make full use of the CTBT and its verification regime in the process of denuclearization of the Peninsula.

Speaking about these topics, we must not forget the importance of trust at regional and international levels. It takes time to build trust and much more to rebuild it. But once it is there, many things become possible.

The CTBT is a confidence building element, ensuring that no nuclear test goes undetected, a common denominator for NNWS and NWS and a solid basis for continuing dialogue and expanding cooperation. Let us not forget this in our discussions during this event.

As to this Conference, we will also brainstorm and focus on new issues. The CTBT's contribution to Sustainable Development Goals, for example. Standing at the intersection of the disarmament and development nexus, the CTBTO can definitely help the international community achieve these goals. So let us discuss further how these partnerships can be built.

We would also talk about Kazakhstan's leading efforts to promote the prohibition of nuclear testing. We will also see the work that is being done first-hand, at the National Nuclear Center of the Republic of Kazakhstan in Kurchatov, before visiting the Semipalatinsk test site.

With uncertainties clouding the international political area, it may seem difficult to agree on much. But we can still agree that the world does not need more nuclear weapons or nuclear testing.

Let me once again wish all of you a successful conference.

Thank you.