



CTBTO
PREPARATORY COMMISSION

COMPREHENSIVE
NUCLEAR-TEST-BAN
TREATY ORGANIZATION

Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization

Lassina Zerbo, Executive Secretary

75th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

New York, 23 November 2020

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to address the 75th Session of the General Assembly under the agenda sub-item “Cooperation between the United Nations and the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization”.

Allow me to thank the President for convening today’s meeting. I would also like to express my appreciation to the Secretary-General for his report on cooperation between the United Nations and regional and other organizations.

The circumstances surrounding COVID-19 prevent me from addressing the plenary in person. However, I am grateful for the opportunity to address the Assembly virtually.

Advancing peace and prosperity through multilateral cooperation

These are troubling times. The spread of COVID-19 is accelerating at an alarming pace. My heartfelt sympathies and condolences are with those affected by this terrible disease.

COVID-19 has shaken the world and forever changed the way we think about global health risks. It has thrown our world into disarray.

But the international community was already troubled by sharp divisions and rising geopolitical tensions.

Collective measures to enhance human security and promote sustainable development have become more and more crucial. Yet adopting and implementing such measures has become more and more difficult.

What were once localized challenges are becoming increasingly transboundary in nature. And potential spill over consequences can impact the global community as a whole.

Advanced technologies are rapidly spreading around the world, and with them their inherent security risks. We have witnessed the effect of climate change on the severity and frequency of natural disasters. Terrorism and other forms of political violence threaten peace and

development in many parts of the world. And weapons of mass destruction continue to be the greatest immediate threat to humanity in both scale and consequence.

We cannot pursue narrow self-interest and expect to build a better future for the next generation. Seeking multilateral solutions to twenty-first century challenges remains the only viable approach.

Kofi Annan once said: “More than ever before in human history, we share a common destiny. We can master it only if we face it together. And that is why we have the United Nations.”

These words could not be truer as we observe the scope and complexity of the challenges facing the world today. And it is why we need the United Nations more than ever to help advance peace and prosperity through multilateral cooperation.

Reducing nuclear threats through cooperative disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control measures remains an urgent priority. Finishing the unfinished business of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) is a crucial part of these efforts.

Cooperation between the CTBTO and the United Nations

The Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO) and the United Nations have a strong record of partnering together to promote nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

This cooperative relationship has succeeded in advancing the entry into force and universalization of the CTBT. While yet to enter into force, the CTBTO and the United Nations have effectively collaborated to build support for the Treaty and its verification regime.

We have solidified the *de facto* international norm against nuclear testing. We are nearing completion of the most far reaching monitoring system ever designed. And this system has already proven capable of carrying out its verification requirements under the Treaty.

With the support of our Member States, the United Nations, and other partners around the world, these capabilities continue to improve.

By promoting training and education in the field of nuclear disarmament non-proliferation, the CTBTO also continues to work for the empowerment of the next generation. In these efforts, we are particularly focused on women and those in the developing world. Building capacities in all areas related to the CTBT ensures the Treaty’s continued viability, and contributes to our shared objective of a world free of nuclear weapons.

In this light, the CTBTO Youth Group (CYG) remains engaged and energized. Nearly one thousand CYG members are actively advocating on behalf of the Treaty and its verification regime. These activities complement the efforts of Member States and other partners to advance the Treaty’s entry into force and universalization.

The United Nations remains a key partner in these and other initiatives aimed at reinforcing the CTBT and bringing us closer to entry into force.

For example, Secretary-General’s Agenda for Disarmament includes an appeal to all States whose ratifications are required for its entry into force to commit to sign and ratify the Treaty at an early date. Importantly, the Secretary-General notes that the States whose ratifications are required for the Treaty to enter into force have a special responsibility to lead, without waiting for any other State.

These activities and initiatives support the implementation of the agreement regulating the relationship between the United Nations and the CTBTO. In working jointly to achieve our common objectives, we must redouble our efforts in these areas.

The CTBTO as a Mature, Competent, and Effective Organization

In addition to the tragic consequences of COVID-19 for people all over the world, its emergence also resulted in an unforeseen stress test for the Organization. However, we assessed the circumstances and responded quickly with measures to ensure business continuity.

Teleworking arrangements were implemented on short notice and with high performance efficiency. Critical user groups were identified and provided with the necessary tools and support to establish and sustain remote connectivity and communication.

We have continued to refine and enhance these tools in the face of the ongoing pandemic. We have reviewed and updated our business continuity plan, improving our readiness to respond to unpredictable circumstances.

This experience has reinforced our confidence in the ability to keep the Organization and its verification regime functioning at a high level even under conditions of severe duress.

We have already demonstrated on countless occasions that the Organization and its verification regime has reached a high level of operational readiness. And our ongoing response to COVID-19 further underlines that the CTBTO is a mature, competent, and effective Organization.

We are ready for the world.

With every new signature and ratification; with every new station built; and with every additional voice of support for the CTBT in international forums, it is increasingly clear that the world is ready for us.

Bridge Building

The final point I would like to make today is that we need to reorient ourselves towards being more effective bridge builders.

National interests will always inform a country's policy choices and preferences. But there must be room for negotiation and compromise in the pursuit of common goals. In fact, it's a necessity if we are to succeed in addressing shared threats.

Various approaches to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation have been advanced throughout the years. Some garner wide or even universal support, while others either stall or are rendered ineffective.

One such initiative that has been a consistent matter of contention in many multilateral forums achieved a significant success this year – the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). With the deposit of the 50th ratification last month, the treaty will now enter into force in January 2021.

The ultimate impact or efficacy of the TPNW is yet to be determined. But it is without doubt that its emergence demonstrated the passion and determination of those countries advocating for a world free of nuclear weapons. It has also succeeded in elevating and broadening the discussion on nuclear weapons to a point not seen in years.

These are both encouraging signs. And it is my hope that the renewed focus on nuclear threats will provide space for progress on the CTBT.

Verifiably putting an end to nuclear explosions remains a near universal objective. With your support, we have put in place the tools and techniques to do just that.

We are demonstrating the value of monitoring data and technologies in countless civil and scientific applications. Many of these directly support the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

What I ask of you, the Member States of the United Nations, is to focus on our mutually shared goal of a legally binding, verifiable end to nuclear testing. This is a crucial step in the path towards a nuclear weapon free world, and will reinforce the essential role of multilateralism in advancing international peace and security.

Thank you.