



CTBTO
PREPARATORY COMMISSION

PUTTING AN
END TO NUCLEAR
EXPLOSIONS

High-Level Meeting of the General Assembly to Commemorate and Promote the International Day against Nuclear Tests

New York, 31 August 2026

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Mr President, Excellencies, Distinguished delegates,

I'm honoured to address the General Assembly on this important occasion. In 2009, this Assembly responded to an excellent initiative by Kazakhstan. It proclaimed 29 August as the International Day Against Nuclear Tests.

Why that day?

Because on 29 August 1991, the Semipalatinsk nuclear weapons testing site in today's Kazakhstan was shut down. Between 1949 and 1989, that one site saw 456 nuclear tests. 456 tests. At that one site.

But this was not the only site. Those were not the only tests. Since 1945 our planet has seen more than 2000 nuclear test explosions. The vast majority of those tests took place before 1996. But in the past three decades? Fewer than 12 nuclear weapon explosive tests have been detected and announced. The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty has helped create a new global norm. A norm against any nuclear testing.

Friends, today we're close to universality. Almost every state on Earth has joined the CTBT! Only last month, the Kingdom of Tonga joined our CTBT family. Our congratulations to Tonga on both signing and ratifying! 188 states have now signed. 179 have ratified. Every country that has signed the treaty – and most of the 8 that have not – they support the object and purpose of the Treaty.

We've come so far. From those long decades of nuclear testing seeming 'normal', to today's international norm against nuclear testing. How has the treaty made this happen?

We've set up an International Monitoring System, our IMS. A technological marvel. It's now over 90% complete. 308 certified networked facilities working day and night to the highest agreed international scientific standards. Checking for nuclear tests. In the oceans. On every continent. In the atmosphere. Every day we take in some 36 gigabytes of data. And all that data is available to every CTBT state signatory. Transparently. Equally. Fairly.

Technology and analysis techniques have galloped forward since the Treaty was opened for signature in 1996. Our systems today can detect tests far smaller than what the Treaty negotiators expected. The IMS was originally designed to detect tests with a yield of some 1000 tons of TNT equivalent. Today's IMS detection goes down to 500 tons! That is – just over 3% of the power of the bomb that devastated Hiroshima. Amazing sensitivity. But ... 500 tons is not zero tons!

The Treaty bans all nuclear tests. However big. However tiny. And any nuclear test is a matter of grave global concern. The CTBT's success is built on science, but it is also built on confidence. Today, the science is working. But the confidence is under strain. We must be clear-eyed about the need to build confidence, especially for low-yield testing below the level of 500 tons. There are steps that can be taken, today and now. And ultimately, we must keep striving for the best solution that tomorrow promises - entry into force of the CTBT.

2026 is our Treaty's 30th anniversary year! We celebrate something extraordinary. The CTBT has worked as intended. A near-halt to nuclear testing since 1996. A remarkable success. But have we guaranteed a verifiable end to all nuclear testing, once and for all? No-one here today needs reminding. The international scene is tense. Full of mistrust. Those tensions extend to discussions around nuclear testing. Imagine our world if the CTBT falters, and the norm against nuclear testing collapses. A world with unconstrained testing, using all of today's technology. A world where suspected tests are not even worth debating, because it has become normal again. Old nuclear arsenals expand. New nuclear arsenals are built. Nuclear proliferation runs rampant.

Soaring risks of nuclear miscalculation. Risks of nuclear misadventure. Devastation from nuclear 'bad luck'.

That is not the world we have. It is not the world we've worked so hard to build. It is not the world we continue to strive for. So, let us make sure it is not the world we leave behind.