

Regional Workshop on the CTBTO for States in the Pacific
Melekeok, Palau
21-22 May 2009

Minister's Opening Statement

Excellency, Honored Guests, Ladies & Gentlemen:

I am honored to be here this morning to officially open this Workshop on the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty for the Pacific Island States on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Palau. Indeed, you have come a long way and we thank you for making your long journey to the "Rainbow's End".

Having witnessed the devastation of World War Two; the aftermaths of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; and the nuclear testings in the Marshall Islands and French Polynesia, the Framers of the Palau Constitution back in 1979 enacted Article II of the Palau Constitution which bans the use, testing, storage, or disposal of nuclear, toxic, chemical, gas or biological weapons intended for use in warfare.

It is with this backdrop that the Republic of Palau signed the CTBT in 2003. Palau is honored and pleased to host this Workshop because we strongly believe that it is a matter of national security that all of the Pacific Basin becomes truly "nuclear free Pacific". Palau is also honored to be part of the global security by housing the CTBT Infrasound Monitoring System which is designed to register sound and energy vibrations underground, in the sea and in the air, and to detect radio-nuclides released into the atmosphere after a warhead has been detonated.

North Korea's testing of their Taepo-Dong rockets is both unacceptable and pose great danger to our regional security and stability. The world is much more dangerous now given the desire of non state actors to acquire nuclear and other types of weapons of mass destruction.

It is because of these given concerns, Palau volunteered to co-host this Workshop together with the CTBTO in the hopes that we in the Pacific Islands Forum can place this issue as one of our top priorities and quickly join this Treaty without further delay.

Like the AP Mine Ban Treaty, we in the Pacific may not possess nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, but by our joining this Treaty would strengthen the universalization of this Treaty, thus isolating the users and wanna-be users of these weapons to their own regions.

Friends and Colleagues, we are blessed with this vast Pacific Ocean where we derive our culture and livelihood from. But we are also defenseless given that we don't have our own navies to monitor for the illicit trade of small arms and light weapons. What we can do as a first step towards our common defense is to join CTBT and implement laws to ban the transits of nuclear weapons and radioactive wastes. Palau attaches great concern over the transport of radioactive wastes because of typhoons. It is unthinkable how Palau would react if there is an accident in the high seas involving radioactive wastes. There is also that danger of high seas terrorism where non-state actors may in the future sabotage ships carrying radioactive wastes. This is most possible given that we are witnessing piracy off the coast of Somalia as a common order of business.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish you all a fruitful Workshop and I hope you'll enjoy the rest of your stay in our beautiful and majestic islands.

I declare this Workshop officially open.