

OPENING REMARKS
by H.E. Lazăr COMĂNESCU
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania
Chair of the PrepCom

*Executive Secretary Dr. Zerbo,
Distinguished colleagues,
Honorable guests,
Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,*

First of all, I would like to thank all the ministers and high officials who have responded positively to the invitation that I sent in March, together with my colleagues from Japan and Kazakhstan, Minister Kishida and Minister Idrissov, and the Executive Secretary of the CTBTO, Dr. Lassina Zerbo.

Our presence here today, to mark the 20th anniversary of the opening for signature of the CTBT and the establishment of the Preparatory Commission, is a telling evidence of the broad political support for and commitment to the Treaty and its goal, which is, as stipulated in the Preamble, *“to contribute effectively to the prevention of the proliferation of nuclear weapons in all its aspects, to the process of nuclear disarmament and therefore to the enhancement of international peace and security”*.

We have before us, today, a program of events that will allow the high officials of the Signatory States not only to restate their strong pledge in favor of the Treaty, but also to generate a renewed political momentum for the urgency of its entry into force and its universalization, by identifying creative ideas that will re-energize the path towards ratification in the remaining Annex 2 states.

Besides the official part of the program that will take place in this room, ministers will have the opportunity to interact and exchange ideas in a more informal way during the round table discussions which will tackle the topics of how to overcome the challenges in obtaining the signatures or ratifications still needed for the Treaty’s entry into force, and to review the security and civilian benefits of the verification regime of the Treaty. We will all have the chance to see, in practice, how the verification regime performs, not only at the exhibition in the Rotunda, but also during the tour of the International Data Centre for those of you who are interested.

Romania is among the countries that signed the Treaty on the first day of its opening for signature and ratified it early. We are a constant and active promoter of the Treaty’s entry into force and universalization, having twice assumed the responsibility of chairing the Preparatory Commission, in 2001 and this year, and we are also represented within the Group of Eminent Persons. It is with great honor and a deep sense of responsibility that we coordinated the preparations for the 20th anniversary and I want to thank you all, Signatory States, the Executive Secretary and the Provisional Technical Secretariat, for the constant support and valuable proposals that made this event possible. Since the second half of last year, my country has had the honor to work together with all of you through an open, transparent and inclusive process, to prepare this series of anniversary events intended to acknowledge the Treaty’s merits, as well as to promote its entry into force and universalization.

This anniversary is an occasion of thorough reflection on the achievements of the CTBT over the past 20 years after its opening for signature. One can proudly note that the Treaty has become a most efficient deterrent: nuclear explosive tests are now an anomaly, carried out against an established international standard. Only one country is still testing in the XXI century and its behavior is unacceptable for the international community that stands firm and united against any such breach.

This is much to the credit of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, which encapsulates the combined international effort and political will to put an end to what was previously a widespread practice.

Although still provisional, the CTBTO has a truly global monitoring presence that is able to do something that no single country could achieve: collecting and analyzing data sent from 282 certified stations all around the world and making clandestine nuclear explosive tests impossible. The data collected by the International Monitoring System and sent to the International Data Centre are available in a uniquely completely democratic manner to all Signatory States. Besides its security merits, it has numerous scientific and civilian applications that we all benefit from, such as early warning for tsunamis and earthquakes and climate change mitigation. These achievements are fully in line with the sustainable development goals, as stated in the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

Bearing in mind all these achievements, I would like to convey my warm appreciation to the all the Executive Secretaries, past and present, and to the PTS for their highly professional work in building an efficient and reliable verification regime and making all the data available to the States Signatories, 24/7, thus preparing the organization to be fully effective and operational on the day the Treaty will enter into force. I would also like to express special thanks to the current Executive Secretary, Dr. Lassina Zerbo, for his tireless efforts in the service of the promotion of the Treaty's entry into force and its universalization, including through the Group of Eminent Persons.

*Ministers,
Distinguished delegates,*

Alongside these commendable achievements, today all of us are aware of the fact that we are facing unfinished business: the CTBT is still not in force, 20 years after its opening for signature. This is a rather unique and regrettable situation, against the backdrop of a challenging international security context. The Treaty cannot be of full utility to the international community because the third pillar of the verification regime, On-Site Inspection, the only instrument that can fully verify whether a nuclear explosive test has taken place, cannot be used.

The deadlock we are in is fraught with considerable risks, which we must work together to avert. Nobody in this room, at least, would like to see the diminution of the existing nearly universal political support for the goal of the Treaty, namely a permanent end to nuclear explosive testing. Lack of forward progress could lead to a possible loss of interest in further financing and completing the verification regime. Likewise, if the present stalemate were to continue, it could affect the stability and professionalism of the PTS's experts. An even greater danger is using the lack of prospects for entry into force as an excuse for a state's abrogation of its ratification or resuming testing altogether. We must also be wary of the temptation to search for alternative paths to the Treaty's entry into force which may grow out of frustration.

The future remains uncertain except, perhaps, for one thing, which is that the entry into force of the CTBT cannot be addressed in a vacuum, but as part of the international and regional security contexts. It is our duty and responsibility to work together to prevent any return to the situation as it was before the adoption of the CTBT.

In conclusion, let us focus our attention and creativity today, with a sense of urgency, on how to advance the Treaty's entry into force in the current challenging environment and how to maintain this issue high on the international political agenda in parallel with raising the awareness of our publics to the unquestionable benefits of the Treaty and its verification regime for international peace and security.