

The Role of the United Nations in Promoting a CTBT

Opening remarks

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Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. The United Nations Information Service (UNIS) and the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) are to be congratulated for organizing this timely seminar on the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). It is vital that the participants in the CD share their progress with those outside the negotiations, for their work is our work -- their success is our success. Conversely, their failure will be our failure. This cannot be allowed to happen. As Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali stated in his message to the CD earlier this year, "...nothing must be allowed to deter us from [concluding a CTBT]."

2. The last General Assembly of the United Nations has set before the Conference on Disarmament (CD) the very specific goal of concluding a CTBT and having it ready for signature before it's next session, which convenes later this year. I believe this goal can -- indeed, must -- be met.

3. The conclusion of a CTBT will bring about the realization of a long-standing aspiration within the international community. Since 1954, when Indian Prime Minister, Nehru, proposed the so-called "stand-still" agreement, the international community has sought to achieve an end to nuclear weapon testing. The Partial Test Ban Treaty (1963), the Threshold Test Ban Treaty (1974), and the Peaceful Nuclear Explosions Treaty (1976) all represent important accomplishments and reflect the prevailing political climate of the

times. However, they stop well short of what the international community expects. Furthermore, today, in the wake of the cold war, we can now achieve what was hitherto impossible.

4. The importance of concluding a CTBT in the field of arms regulation and disarmament should be self-evident. It will help curtail the development of new designs of nuclear weapons, thus putting an end to the qualitative nuclear arms race. It will create additional barriers to the deployment and use of the existing nuclear weapons. It will considerably solidify the non-proliferation regime. And it will eliminate one of the asymmetries between nuclear and non-nuclear States.

5. Yet, the importance of a CTBT goes far beyond disarmament. It will bring significant economic benefits by allowing the nuclear-weapon States to reallocate sizeable resources involved in testing to other, more productive, sectors of the economy. It will eliminate a dangerous threat to our environment. It will allow scientists and experts to apply their skills and talents toward finding solutions to new and pressing problems such as nuclear safety and disarmament -- once a call for action and now a reality.

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6. The United Nations has addressed the problem of atomic weapons since their first use. In fact, the first resolution of the General Assembly expressed its members' aspirations to eliminate atomic weapons and to ensure that atomic energy would be used only for peaceful purposes. The UN has since provided strong moral and political pressure in favour of the cessation of nuclear tests. Since 1957 the question of stopping all nuclear-weapon tests has been a separate item on the agenda of the UN General Assembly, which has repeatedly adopted resolutions urging that the Member States begin substantive work on a CTBT. In particular, the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly on Disarmament, held in 1978, recognized that the cessation of nuclear-weapon testing would make an important contribution to the goal of ending the qualitative improvement of

nuclear weapons and the development of new types of such weapons and of preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

7. United Nations' efforts were especially useful in two important respects. First, General Assembly resolutions reflected the growing concern of the international community and helped to maintain pressure on the nuclear powers, which forced them to compromise and find solutions. Second, UN-supported research and expert discussions at UN fora helped these Governments and others to understand more fully the potential disasters that nuclear weapons posed. United Nations actions also helped educate, and benefitted from, the public.

8. The international community has pursued three major approaches to the concluding a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. The first sought unilateral and coordinated multilateral moratoriums on nuclear tests. Though the nuclear-weapon States from time to time announced unilateral moratoriums on testing - often for considerable periods of time -- this approach failed to create a multilateral agreement.

9. A second idea was to convert the Partial Test Ban Treaty into a comprehensive ban. This proposal was first put forward in 1985. The UN General Assembly recommended that the PTBT's provision for amending the treaty into a CTBT be explored. However, the PTBT amendment conference held at the UN Headquarters in January 1991 was not able to reach a satisfactory compromise. It was concluded that in light of the complexity of certain aspects of a test ban, especially with regard to verification, further work needed to be undertaken.

10. The third approach was to take advantage of the unique expertise, structure, and mandate of the Conference on Disarmament -- the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum of the international community -- to draft the treaty. The CD had acquired tremendous experience and skill in

completing the chemical weapons Convention, which was then moving toward a successful conclusion. Furthermore, the CD and its predecessors had been involved with aspects of the test ban issue since the middle of the 1970s. In 1976 it created an Ad hoc Group of Scientific Experts to Consider International Cooperative Measures to Detect and Identify Seismic Events. This group has been responsible for producing numerous important reports.

11. In 1993 the CD gave its Ad hoc Committee on a Nuclear Test Ban a mandate to negotiate a comprehensive test-ban treaty. Since 1994 the Conference has been involved in intensive negotiations with regard to the CTBT. This is not an easy process. The enormous complexity of the problems and diverse views of the parties involved prevented the Conference from achieving a quick result. However time has not been wasted. In the course of these debates the issues and negotiating positions were clearly identified.

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12. Today we find ourselves approaching the end of some two years of focused and intense negotiations. The current working document -- the so-called "rolling text of the draft treaty" -- is still heavily "bracketed." Some 1,200 brackets remain. They correspond chiefly to the following outstanding issues: (a) the preamble; (b) the scope of the treaty; (c) on-site inspections; (d) the composition of the Executive Council; (e) conditions for entry into force; and (f) review of the treaty. Political will, more than anything else, is required to remove these brackets and conclude the treaty.

13. I firmly believe that the flexible structure of negotiations over the rolling text and expertise within the CD will permit us to reach our goal -- this year. The representatives to the CD are the top professionals in the field and are experienced diplomats. They have at their disposal a small but effective international secretariat to support their work. (In this connection, I would like to welcome UN Headquarter's decision -- that despite the financial and budgetary crises facing the Organization -- to strengthen the Geneva Branch of the Centre for Disarmament Affairs that supports the work of the Conference.)

14. What will not help us reach this historic milestone, is linking progress in one area to the completion of the treaty. The Secretary-General has repeatedly favoured what I call "constructive parallelism," which seeks to move forward on issues of fundamental importance to international peace and security whenever and wherever possible. The completion of a CTBT, like the indefinite extension of the NPT, is one such example.

15. The momentum of history is on our side. Besides the successful conclusion of last year's NPT Review and Extension Conference, this year will mark the formal signing in Cairo next month of the Pelindaba Treaty making the entire continent of Africa a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone. The three remaining Nuclear-Weapon States that have not yet done so, have announced their intention to sign the relevant Protocols of the Treaty of Raratonga, which will strengthen considerably the South Pacific Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone. Furthermore, the countries of South-East Asia have recently formally declared their intention to conclude their own nuclear-weapon free zone.

16. To conclude a CTBT according to the General Assembly's time-frame, we must work in a spirit of cooperation, with a sense of urgency, and exhibit the necessary political will and flexibility. Let 1996 be remembered in history as the year the world outlawed nuclear-weapon tests.

