

Time to bring a definitive end to nuclear weapons testing

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For a period of more than 50 years, thousands of nuclear tests were conducted on the earth's surface, underground, in the atmosphere, above the atmosphere and underwater. Countries used these tests to develop their nuclear weapons, increasing the sophistication of their knowledge and warhead designs. At the same time, the radioactivity that tests generated did lasting harm to human health, societies and the environment.

Today, thankfully, nuclear tests are an anomaly. The immediate and universal condemnation of the nuclear test on 9 September by North Korea, the only country that has conducted tests since the turn of the century, demonstrates the conviction of the international community that nuclear testing weakens global peace and security. However, the de facto international norm against testing remains fragile. What is urgently needed is the lasting, legally binding and verifiable ban embodied in the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), a treaty essential to reducing the dangers of nuclear weapons and advancing the goal of a world free from these weapons of mass destruction.

Twenty years after its adoption by the United Nations General Assembly, though, the CTBT has yet to enter into force. There are eight countries – China, Egypt, India, Iran, Israel, North Korea, Pakistan and the United States – that specifically must still join the treaty before it can take effect. As long as this impasse persists, the goal of a legal and verifiable ban on nuclear testing will remain unrealized.

United in our commitment to achieving early entry into force of this treaty, we aim to raise awareness of its importance at the highest political levels. The total ban on nuclear test explosions, or any other nuclear explosions, established by the CTBT is essential to our common security and constitutes a fundamental step towards the elimination of nuclear weapons by constraining their development and qualitative improvement.

We welcome the progress that has been made towards universal adherence to the treaty, and we encourage the countries that have not yet done so to join without delay. By taking this step, countries can clearly and tangibly demonstrate their commitment to nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, and to international peace and security. Entry-into-force would also constitute a key effective measure under Article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) pertaining to nuclear disarmament. In the case of the Middle East or South Asia, we would encourage coordinated ratification as a possible way to help defuse regional tensions.

While we work to achieve entry into force of the CTBT, its robust and state-of-the-art verification system is nearing completion. The worldwide network of more than 300 data monitoring stations and laboratories, analysts, scientists and national experts, has already demonstrated its worth, promptly detecting the deplorable nuclear tests carried out by North Korea in 2006, 2009, 2013 and twice in 2016.

In addition to its crucial verification function, the International Monitoring System is of great value in compiling accurate, timely data about earthquakes, tsunamis and nuclear accidents, as well as producing unique sets of data that can be used by research communities for scientific study. All countries stand to benefit from active engagement with this system, overseen by the treaty organization (CTBTO) in Vienna.

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Because of the importance of this treaty in preventing the further spread of nuclear weapons and working towards nuclear disarmament, we must continue to appeal to all countries to make efforts to achieve this goal. On 21 September this year, we held our biennial ministerial meeting on the margins of the 71st Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York where attending Ministers confirmed the vital importance of the treaty and called for its early entry into force. The fact that this year marks the 20th anniversary of the treaty's opening for signature will serve not as a moment for celebration, but rather as a wake-up call that additional action needs urgently to be taken.

It is time to finish the work we started 20 years ago. We must take steps to ensure that the resolute determination of the international community to bring about an end to explosive nuclear tests is finally realized. In particular, those countries whose signature and ratification is needed for the treaty to take effect must be called upon to do so without delay. Entry into force of the CTBT is a crucial step towards global zero - the goal of a world without nuclear weapons, a world safer for all nations and all of humanity.