

**Preparatory Commission for the
Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization**

Executive Secretary Dr Lassina Zerbo

**Address to the Conference on Disarmament
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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mr President, & Dear brother Ambassador Ehet,
Madam Director General Valovaya
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

At the outset, allow me to congratulate you, Mr President, on your assumption of the fourth presidency of the 2021 session of the Conference on Disarmament. I would also like to express my sincere appreciation for the invitation to address the Conference under the agenda item *Introductory Plenary of the Presidency of Cameroon*.

On Africa Day 2021 your presidency on this session is a symbolic Africa attachment to disarmament and development.

It is a distinct honour and pleasure to address the Conference here in Geneva, where twenty-five years ago the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) was negotiated and subsequently adopted by the General Assembly.

Today, I wish to provide an overview of the ongoing work of the Preparatory Commission to fulfil its mandate of carrying out the necessary preparations for the effective implementation of the CTBT and for preparing for the first session of the Conference of the States Parties. In particular, I will focus my remarks on the following points:

1. Business continuity during the COVID-19 pandemic
2. Current status of the Treaty after twenty-five years
3. Strengthening international cooperation for peace and security

Business continuity

Like other organizations around the world, the Commission has been affected by the corona virus pandemic. Meetings and outreach activities have been reduced, and operational priorities have been refocused accordingly. While the COVID-19 pandemic has been a stress test, the functionality and resilience of the organization has been repeatedly proven.

We have swiftly and decisively adapted to the new realities of the time and responded effectively to the challenges at hand. This has been possible thanks to dedicated efforts of staff at the Commission, who have continued to carry out their duties despite all the uncertainties and difficulties surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic.

With almost 90% of the Secretariat's staff performing their duties while working remotely, we managed to make continued progress in the build-up, sustainment, and provisional operation of our verification regime, particularly the International Monitoring System (IMS).

The demonstration of the Organizations' resilience is also a testament to our States Signatories' engagement and cooperation, in particular National Authorities and Station Operators that have spare no effort to sustain operations.

The Commission also continues to strengthen its on-site inspections (OSI) capabilities. The development of the OSI element includes the conduct of various types of exercises to test OSI scenarios, training and other activities aimed at sustaining OSI operational readiness. Regrettably, due to the global pandemic, all in-person events have been postponed. Nevertheless, active implementation of innovative online learning technologies has enabled us to maintain the efficiency of our trainings and sustain broad participation of experts in these events.

Moreover, the virtual format of our workshops, capacity building and training activities, and outreach events has made it possible to exceed previous levels participation and expand our geographical reach.

The Commission's business continuity plan was completely revamped and will continue to be revised as we draw upon lessons learned from our experience with COVID-19. Preservation of our monitoring capabilities and functions remains a core priority. We are also working hard to ensure that the organization retains its readiness to react and adapt to future exigencies, thus guaranteeing timely response to a potential nuclear test and uninterrupted provision of services, data, and data products to States Signatories.

Current status of the Treaty

As previously mentioned, this year we will mark the 25th anniversary of the opening for signature of the CTBT. This occasion provides an excellent opportunity to take stock of our collective achievements, assess the challenges we continue to face, and focus our thoughts on future priorities for the organization that will help to lay the groundwork for the Treaty's entry into force and universalization.

There is near universal adherence to the norm against nuclear testing. The Republic of Cuba and the Union of Comoros having recently joined the community of nations which have said never to nuclear testing. This brings the number of CTBT States Signatories to 185, out of which 170 have ratified the Treaty.

The progressive build-up of the International Monitoring System has resulted in a level of maturity, readiness, and relevance that has been demonstrated on numerous occasions and in a variety of circumstances. With nearly 94% of facilities certified, installed, or under construction, the IMS – the backbone of the verification regime – is drawing closer and closer to completion.

Signals registered at IMS stations are processed and analyzed at the International Data Centre, which produces data bulletins that are submitted to the States Signatories for their evaluation and judgement. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, automated IDC products continued to follow defined schedules and meet timeline requirements more than 99% of the time.

The CTBTO is also continuing to prepare for entry into force by strengthening its on-site inspection (OSI) capabilities. The development of the OSI element includes the conduct of various types of

exercises to test OSI scenarios, training and other activities aimed at sustaining OSI operational readiness.

Another integral part of the verification regime is our brand-new Technology Support and Training (TeST) Centre in Seibersdorf, Lower Austria. It serves as a hub for storage, maintenance & testing plus state-of-the-art training facilities. Throughout the pandemic, the TeST Centre remained fully functional.

The CTBT verification regime was designed for monitoring compliance with the Treaty. However, the system provides exceptional added value as an immense source of data that can be utilized for a wide range of civil and scientific applications. The data collected by the IMS and processed by the IDC can contribute to disaster risk reduction, expand knowledge on climate change research, support sustainable development, and more.

This treasure trove of data is freely accessible to all States Signatories and serves as one more example of the vast benefits to be gained from joining the CTBT family. There is enormous potential for this data to be utilized for advancing our understanding of the world around us. It is at the fingertips of all our States Signatories, all they must do is reach out to grab it. Moreover, we continue to make this data available to individual scientists and researchers through the virtual Data Exploitation Centre.

We have also worked hard to align ourselves with the Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service, the UN system of salaries and emolument, to provide more opportunities for our staff and to be an employer of choice. Thus, in 2019 the Commission became a member of the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund.

Strengthening international cooperation for peace and security

The current geopolitical landscape is fraught with tensions and deeply rooted divisions. Well before the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic the international community was already struggling to forge consensus on how to collectively address the multidimensional and transboundary challenges of the 21st century. Where we need trust, cooperation, and good faith, we are often left with mistrust and skepticism. The sphere of international peace and security, and in particular disarmament and non-proliferation, is no exception.

These realities loom large over not only the Conference on Disarmament, but also in nearly every multilateral forum dealing with the threats posed by weapons of mass destruction. This is particularly true of the forthcoming Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

When NPT States Parties eventually gather for this tenth review conference, the obstacles to achieving a successful outcome will be daunting. The rifts and disagreements over several substantial matters continue to hamper efforts to find common ground on core issues related to the implementation of the NPT.

For many years, the lack of a CTBT was one of these challenges. But twenty-five years ago, the international community decided that the time had come. The time had come for a legally binding, verifiable, and enforceable prohibition on all nuclear explosions. An end to nuclear explosions by anyone, anywhere, and for all time.

The international community's response to the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored simple truths that can be broadly applied to our efforts to address global challenges of the day, including the

threats posed by weapons of mass destruction. In order to respond effectively and efficiently to emerging threats, we need to strengthen the multilateral institutions that serve as our frontline defence against challenges to international peace and security.

We need to rely on science as the key driver in constructing and implementing our responses. And we need to promote science diplomacy and international cooperation to build trust and confidence, establish partnerships, and reinforce productive relationships among stakeholders.

The CTBT stands as a highly relevant embodiment of these underlying truths. Our mission can only succeed when all stakeholders are united in their pursuits. We rely on science-based policy making to achieve our verification objectives. And our shared goal of a world free from nuclear tests will only be achieved with science diplomacy and international cooperation, trust, confidence building, neutrality and partnering with all stakeholders on an equal footing.

These are the components of the equation that have made the success of the Commission and enable all States Signatories to benefit from the international exchange of IMS data.

These are the components of the equation that will deliver the world a disarmament and non-proliferation success that has been on the agenda from virtually the beginning of the atomic age. Despite the difficulties involved, this goal is a worthwhile one.

The entry into force and universalization of the CTBT will ensure that no community or environment will again suffer the disastrous consequences of nuclear testing. It will provide stability and promote multilateral cooperation in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation. It will create momentum and build bridges within the context of the NPT.

And most importantly, the Treaty's entry into force will move us substantially forward towards our ultimate goal of a world free of nuclear weapons.

This reality can be achieved if stakeholders remain committed to the cause, and if shared goals are prioritized over division and mistrust. I urge my distinguished friends and colleagues here today and in capitals around the world to not be distracted by difficulties and seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

Let us instead work to build bridges and find common cause. Let us finish the unfinished business of the CTBT by finally putting an end to nuclear explosions, and thereby take a practical and consequential step towards a nuclear-weapons-free world.

Thank you.