

COOK ISLANDS STATEMENT

Mr. President, Parties to the TPNW, Observers, Colleagues & friends,

Kia Orana, greetings to you all on behalf of the Government and people of the Cook Islands

Colleagues, recent global events and the escalation of nuclear rhetoric have brought into sharp focus how real and present the threat of nuclear weapons is. It highlights the need for urgent progress towards a world without nuclear weapons, and the need to prevent the catastrophic humanitarian consequences any use of these weapons would entail. The profound arguments upon which the Treaty of the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) is based are even more vindicated by these disconcerting and alarming developments.

Given the very painful legacy of prolonged nuclear weapons testing in the Pacific Island region, and the close proximity of our country to the testing sites in Kiribati and French Polynesia, the Cook Islands has long recognised the threat nuclear weapons can have to our peace, security and way of life. On 6 August 1985 we signed the South Pacific Nuclear-Free Zone Treaty, which was finalised in our capital island of Rarotonga. The 'Treaty of Rarotonga' as it became widely known, prohibits nuclear weapons in the South Pacific and also bans the testing and use of nuclear explosive technologies – limiting the threat posed by nuclear weapons in our region and strengthening the NPT regime and nuclear non-proliferation.

In maintaining this strong stance on nuclear weapons prohibition in the South Pacific, The Cook Islands was one of the very first in our region to join the TPNW, acceding to the Treaty on the 4th September, 2018, and were one of 10 countries from our region that helped to bring the Treaty into force. However we considered it equally important for our delegation to make the long trip across to Vienna to add our voice to those present here today at the inaugural meeting of parties, to express our collective opposition to the threat of nuclear weapons and the need to eliminate them from our world - rejuvenating commitments to disarmament and reducing existing stockpiles of weapons by those who possess them.

Our delegation has listened with much sympathy to those who have spoken today, providing their testimony on the harmful and long term effects of nuclear weapons testing on human health. We also noted the important linkages made by the Prime Minister of Fiji, to the legacy effects on the health of our ocean space, and the very real impacts of climate change with the corresponding rise in sea level, erosion and severe weather combining to expose harmful radioactive nuclear material previously buried on some of our islands in the Pacific.

Lastly, we express our appreciation to the Government of New Zealand and others who have contributed financially to assisting representation from developing states such as ours and enabling our participation in the important work of this First Meeting of States Parties to the Treaty, and we hope this support will continue to be extended to future sessions of the TPNW.

In closing, the Cook Islands recommit ourselves to the principles enshrined in the Treaty and the others to which it complements, and will work to encourage others in our region who have not yet ratified the Treaty to do so as a matter of urgency.

Thank you and kia manuia.