Mr. President,
Ministers,
High Representative for Disarmament Affairs,
Your Excellencies, and
Distinguished Participants,

I would like to express my sincere congratulations to H.E. Ambassador Alexander Kmentt on your assumption as President of the First Meeting of States Parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Today marks a historic day, a day in which we have risen up to say no to nuclear weapons.

Mr. President,

Kiribati has long supported a world free of nuclear weapons. Having experienced 33 thermonuclear tests by the United Kingdom and the United States of America, Kiribati was motivated to join with dozens of states to sign and ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW).

On April 28, 1958, the UK detonated its largest thermonuclear test under Operation Grapple. The 500 citizens of Kiribati living on Kiritimati at the time of the tests received little protection and inadequate warning. Not being aware of the dangers of such tests, most of them lifted the tarpaulin cover provided for them to catch a glimpse of the spectacular display of the intensely hot cloud of fire above them. Many of these people complained about all sorts of untreatable illnesses and health complications, most of which resulted in death. There were numerous cases of cancer, congenital disabilities, and abnormalities with newborn babies. Cases of these kinds persist with descendants of those on the island when the tests were carried out.

Recognizing our moral duty to help our citizens and the Pacific region, Kiribati agreed to serve as a co-facilitator on implementing Articles 6 and 7, the positive obligations of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, with Kazakhstan.

Over the past year, we developed a working paper on Articles 6 and 7 with Kazakhstan and our good friends from academia and civil society. We organized consultations with states parties, youth groups, and civil society. We produced a series of recommendations for the states parties to consider. One of the recommendations is to establish an international trust fund for affected states.
We further request the establishment of an independent scientific advisory group to assist affected states parties with victim assistance, environmental remediation, and cleaning up contaminated sites. It is crucial for scientists to work with affected states parties and provide their expertise, while also listening to the requests of these states parties.

We wish to continue our work on the positive obligations; and thus, it is our desire to co-chair the intersessional working group on the positive obligations of the TPNW.

Mr. President,

In the lead-up to the 1MSP, Kiribati has encouraged youth to rise up and share their personal stories about nuclear testing in the Pacific region. We have often told them never to give up and reminded them that their stories must be heard.

We are proud that youth from the Pacific are present in this room today and we thank our partner, Kazakhstan for making this possible.

The international community must listen to the voices of youth and of those whose families have suffered from nuclear testing. The international community cannot forget how the former colonial powers treated innocent Pacific Islanders in their pursuit of weapons of mass destruction.

Mr. President,

Nuclear weapons undermine the core tenets of international humanitarian law, and it is unacceptable that a small group of states are spending billions in modernizing and maintaining their nuclear arsenals. These weapons are on hair trigger alert and are ready to annihilate the world. We cannot allow these immoral weapons to continue to threaten humanity. How longer must we live with the danger of a nuclear war?

It is indeed time for us, as states parties, to take concrete actions on the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. The TPNW is a key component of the international disarmament architecture.

We are ready to take action to establish a safer and saner world, free of illegal and immoral weapons. In this regard, I am pleased to announce that Kiribati is ready to host a TPNW centre on Christmas Island for the Pacific region as announced by my President at the 76th Session of the UN General Assembly.

Thank you