

Statement by H.E. Ms Deborah Stokes, Ambassador, at the Conference on Facilitating the Entry into Force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, Vienna, September 2003.

Thank you, Mr President. May I take this opportunity to congratulate you on your assumption of the Presidency of this Conference. My delegation looks forward to working with you for a successful outcome, particularly the adoption of a forward-looking Declaration and accompanying practical measures, which will enhance the CTBT's prospects for entry into force.

May I also take this opportunity to convey the strong support for this Conference and its goals by the Australian Foreign Minister, Mr Downer, who is unable to join us today.

A core element of Australia's foreign policy is our view that multilateral agreements and institutions continue to play a helpful role in preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. They make the proliferation and use of these weapons more difficult - although they will not, on their own, stop proliferation. While prospects for progress on some important elements of multilateral arms control have stalled, Australia continues to look for ways to move forward.

Australia's strong support for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty is based on the practical view that a complete and effective ban on nuclear testing would help prevent the proliferation, and constrain the development of, nuclear weapons. The complete ban on all nuclear testing is in the security interests of all.

Current nuclear-related tensions in the Middle East and on the Korean Peninsula serve as a further powerful reminder of the absolute necessity of reducing the opportunities for the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

The CTBT has already established itself as a powerful norm against further nuclear tests with 168 signatures and 104 ratifications. But the full benefits of the Treaty will only accrue to the international community once it enters into force.

It remains a great disappointment to Australia that, nearly seven years after the Treaty was opened for signature, only 32 of the 44 states whose ratification is required for the Treaty to enter into force have done so. Of these, only three of the five nuclear weapon states, France, Russia and the United Kingdom, have ratified the Treaty. All of the remaining 12 'Annex 2' states have a special responsibility, both to their own citizens and to the rest of the world, to ratify the CTBT and bring it to life.

Like all strong supporters of the CTBT, Australia continues to urge all countries yet to sign and ratify the Treaty to do so as soon as possible. Moreover, the US position on ratification should not be used as an excuse by countries to delay their own signature and ratification.

A number of countries have indicated that they do not oppose the objectives of the treaty, but have simply not yet undertaken the necessary internal bureaucratic processes. While the onus to sign and ratify the treaty must be on individual states, Australia will provide, wherever possible, technical assistance for states to complete the process of ratification.

Australia will also continue to play a strong role in urging ratification of the CTBT wherever it can. You will recall that in September last year, the Australian Foreign Minister, Mr Downer, joined with his Japanese and Dutch counterparts to present a joint ministerial statement urging those states who had not yet done so, to sign and ratify the CTBT. More recently Mr Downer in conjunction with his Canadian and New Zealand counterparts wrote to a number of Annex 2 states to urge them to ratify the Treaty.

Notwithstanding the efforts made to date, it is vital that we find new and innovative ways to put moral and political pressure on 'holdout' states to accede to the Treaty. For this reason, it is vital that this conference agree on a strong political declaration which will focus attention on the CTBT and the necessity of bringing its entry into force. Failure to do so would represent a significant setback.

We have been heartened by the constructive approach of those delegations who took part in the informal consultations on the draft conference declaration and particularly by the focus on practical measures to promote entry into force. Australia believes that agreement by this Conference to these measures will provide additional momentum towards our shared objective of a world without nuclear testing.

Australia is encouraged by the CTBTO Preparatory Commission's efforts to establish the Treaty's verification machinery. Substantial progress has been made in building up this system since the first Article XIV Conference in 1999. Australia is confident that an operational monitoring and verification system will provide a credible and effective way to monitor Treaty compliance and is committed to continuing to make a strong contribution towards this goal, including through our hosting of International Monitoring System stations. Even ahead of entry into force, the Treaty's monitoring mechanisms will make it virtually impossible for nuclear explosive testing of any significant yield to take place without detection. This creates a further disincentive for nuclear weapons development or proliferation.

We therefore urge all supporters of the CTBT to continue to honour their obligations in ensuring that adequate resources are provided to develop and establish the monitoring and verification system so that not only is it ready for Treaty entry into force, but that we can start reaping a range of scientific and civil benefits beforehand.

To conclude, Mr President, Australia does not underestimate the obstacles to be overcome in aiming for entry into force, but it is our hope that this Conference will help provide the necessary impetus for greater momentum towards the CTBT's entry into force.