
Statement by Dr Robert Floyd Executive Secretary

Opening of the International Workshop on National Data Centres

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Introduction

Thank you. I am pleased to join you today. It is great to see so many participants gathered together for this event – it is the first time we have been able to hold the workshop since its last iteration in Algiers in 2018. And what a good crowd of participants it is! Over 50 NDCs represented, including participation from all CTBT regions. Indeed, it is my pleasure to address you today.

I would like to start with a story.

Many of you will recall in January, the explosive eruption of the Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha’apai volcano in Tonga. This catastrophic explosive eruption and tsunami generated infrasound, seismic and hydroacoustic signals. This eruption was the largest event ever detected by the IMS infrasound network. As the pressure waves created by this violent interaction of magma and seawater spread throughout the atmosphere, our infrasound stations, all around the world, began to light up one by one.

Before long, every one of the 53 certified infrasound stations recorded signals from the event. But this is not the most impressive part. In fact, the pressure waves were recorded each time they completed a tour around the globe for at least four days after the eruption.

Now, I wanted to tell that story for two reasons. First, because it is a remarkable example of the sensitivity of the CTBTO’s verification regime.

And, second, because it is a testament to the importance of your work in the NDCs.

I recently told that story to a high-level group on the margins of the UN General Assembly – Heads of State, Foreign Ministers and the like. I knew what was probably ‘front of mind’ for these leaders – when it comes to nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, ominous dark

clouds are gathering: ongoing conflicts conjure fears of the return of nuclear brinkmanship, and another nuclear test may be on the horizon.

It is a time of uncertainty, and this story allowed me to respond with certitude. I shared a clear message: The CTBTO is already a success story, delivering on our promise to detect any nuclear weapons test, any time, any place.

So, that is some context to set the scene for this workshop. It is against this backdrop that you meet today, to share, teach, learn and ultimately enhance your skills – thereby strengthening our verification regime and our ability to meet the needs of our time.

Because the NDCs play a key role for CTBT.

The verification system is the backbone of that promise to detect any nuclear weapon test. It is fundamental to the CTBT because the Treaty is more than just a political statement. Our Treaty is unique because of our ability to back up our commitment to a world free from nuclear tests with a state-of-the-art network of labs, stations and data centres that can deliver on that promise.

Further, the NDCs play a key role in the credibility of this asset because of the democratic nature of the data collection and analysis built into the system. Indeed, it is designed so that any of you, as NDC experts, can request and independently analyse data from an event bulletin, which means any characterisation of an event is incontrovertible - No one can dismiss it as politically motivated. No, at the CTBTO, we deal with just the facts.

This is a key strength of the CTBT/CTBTO, and it underpins the unique role we play as a confidence builder within the global non-proliferation and disarmament architecture.

And the NDCs play a key role for the countries that host them.

Not only does the network of NDCs enable independent verification at a national level, NDCs are also a gateway to myriad civil and scientific applications.

The data gathered can contribute to tsunami warning systems, earthquake and climate change studies, and a multitude of other applications. Our monitoring system can help reduce deaths from natural disasters...

That is why I have launched the ‘National Data Centres for All Initiative,’ an effort, supported by many, many countries to ensure that all States Signatories of the CTBT can use this data to the fullest, for the benefit of all – particularly in the smallest of states.

Currently, 43 out of 186 States Signatories have yet to designate their NDCs. Many of them are developing countries that may not be aware of the value of an NDC and lack the necessary resources to establish one.

The NDCs4All initiative focuses on assisting developing countries to establish their NDCs, which will enable them to use the data collected by the IMS for national purposes. There is a clear need for the CTBTO to redouble its efforts to highlight the importance of NDCs among the remaining countries, especially those developing countries without IMS facilities, and to encourage them to designate an NDC. We stand ready to provide them with the necessary assistance.

So, I hope this has been an opportunity to reaffirm your awareness of the importance we at the CTBTO place on the role of the NDCs - both for the Organization and for its members.

I also hope this workshop proves an opportunity for each of you to benefit from a rich and productive exchange to further build your skills. I encourage you to use it as an opportunity to build cross-regional and cross-continental networks. This 'networked approach' has already proven to be a successful concept, as demonstrated by the CTBTO Young Professional Network (YPN), a joint initiative between NORSAR and the CTBTO for the younger generation of NDC staff across the globe. The YPN counts almost 90 young members from over 30 countries and demonstrates the benefits that can be gained by continuing the dialogue, long after the training or workshop has ended.

And, finally, I hope that, with the NDCs4All initiative, the family of NDC experts grows, and there will be some new faces at the next NDC workshop.

Thank you.