

Statement on Nuclear Weapons

Delivered by H.E. Teburoro Tito, Permanent Representative of Kiribati to the United Nations.

Dear Chair and Distinguished Participants,

During the second half of the last century, the Pacific region was ravaged by more than 300 nuclear tests. Two great powers, the United Kingdom and the United States, devastated Kiribati when they tested 33 nuclear weapons at Malden and Christmas Islands between 1957 and 1962, providing little protection to hundreds of civilians living on Christmas Island who subsequently developed terminal radiogenic illnesses, including cancer which continue to plague the health and lives of their children and grandchildren up to now.

As the nuclear weapon states developed their weapons, it was our people who suffered from their devastating effects. They thought that our people would easily acquiesce to the use and testing of these weapons. They presumed that the international community would not care about the testing of nuclear weapons in a remote part of the world.

Our suffering at the hands of these nuclear weapon states in the name of world peace has fully convinced us that nuclear weapons are evil and must not be allowed to be used as instruments of peace and security whether national, regional or international. They must be erased from the face of the earth if we really want to be in a better world as envisioned by the founding fathers of the United Nations. If we are wise and if we love our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, then we have one only one choice to make: the complete elimination of nuclear weapons.

Due to the tragic legacy of nuclear tests in our home, Kiribati has committed itself to seeking nuclear justice for the victims and communities impacted by nuclear weapons. As a result, Kiribati actively participated in the lead-up to the 1st Meeting of States Parties of the TPNW and is pleased and appreciative of being allowed to be a co-chair of the informal working group on victim assistance, environmental remediation, international cooperation, and assistance.

We strongly support the Action Plan of the TPNW's First Meeting of States Parties. As part of the action plan, states parties agreed upon a strong set of commitments to begin implementing the treaty's obligations on victim assistance, environmental remediation, and international cooperation and assistance under Articles 6 and 7. These commitments include facilitating the participation of affected communities, civil society, and other stakeholders in this process.

In August of this year, Kiribati participated in the Tenth NPT Review Conference, where we highlighted the legacy of nuclear tests. We focused on the need for states parties to address the suffering caused by nuclear weapons in the Pacific. I was dismayed by calls from certain states for us to be "less emotional" when discussing nuclear weapons. I personally lost many close colleagues to illnesses caused by the testing of nuclear weapons. We have to talk about the humanitarian consequences of these deadly weapons. For us, it would be illogical to ignore the plight of the survivors.

Due to the lack of adherence to the nuclear weapon states' nuclear disarmament commitments, we will continue to express our profound concern and worry about the qualitative and quantitative advancements and modernization of their nuclear arsenals and their exorbitant spending on nuclear weapon programs. We will continue to regard such behavior as unfriendly, irresponsible, dangerous, heartless and inhuman.

Chair and Distinguished Colleagues,

Over the last few weeks, Kiribati monitored the developments in Geneva. Our Pacific colleagues, who have missions in Geneva, introduced a significant resolution in the UN Human Rights Council. This resolution—entitled “Technical assistance and capacity building to address the human rights implications of the nuclear legacy in the Marshall Islands”—calls for the “the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to cooperate with the Government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands in the field of human rights and to provide technical assistance and capacity building to the National Nuclear Commission of the Republic of the Marshall Islands in advancing its national strategy for nuclear justice and in determining its technical assistance and capacity-building needs to pursue transitional justice in its efforts to address the nuclear legacy.” We fully support this initiative by the Marshall Islands.

We are standing up to the Goliaths of the world and declaring that enough is enough. It is time for the user states to recognize their moral responsibility to help affected states. It is also high time for the international community to recognize its complicity in allowing nuclear testing to be carried out in the Pacific for decades and provide assistance to our people.

Bearing in mind the tragic impact of nuclear weapons in the Pacific and recognizing that the TPNW is an instrument of nuclear justice, Kiribati is proud to have co-sponsored resolutions on both the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Together, communities and people who have been impacted by nuclear weapons must stand up and raise their voices. We are proud of youth movements in the Pacific that are advocating for the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons as well as initiatives shown by civil society.

We call upon states to be bold in supporting a world free of nuclear weapons. In this regard, we condemn unequivocally any and all threats to use nuclear weapons, whether they be explicit or implicit and irrespective of the circumstances.

Chair and Distinguished Delegates,

Let's strive to achieve a better world for ourselves, our families, and the next generation.

Thank you.