



**United Nations General Assembly
First Committee**

Thematic Debate on Nuclear Weapons

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Mr. Chair,

Allow me to begin by congratulating you on your election as Chair of First Committee. I assure you of my delegation's full support and cooperation.

This year marks not only seven decades since the world came together to form the United Nations, but also seven decades since one of the lowest points in human history – the horrific atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, whose impacts are still being felt today.

We all have a moral and legal duty to ensure that the very worst weapons of mass destruction – nuclear weapons – are never used again, under any circumstances. Their complete banishment from the world is the only guarantee against such use.

Palau remains firmly committed to achieving a world free of nuclear weapons. We stand in solidarity with the Marshall Islands in its pursuit of legal action aimed at compelling the nuclear-armed states to fulfill their decades-old obligation to disarm.

We are alarmed that all nine nuclear-armed states continue to invest heavily in upgrades to their nuclear arsenals, apparently with the intent to retain them for many decades – perhaps even centuries – to come. This is a recipe for widespread nuclear proliferation, and a recipe for humanitarian catastrophe of unprecedented proportions.

We were disappointed that the recent Non-Proliferation Treaty review conference failed to agree on an outcome document. But the landmark Humanitarian Pledge – now endorsed by 119 nations, including Palau – fills its place, and offers much hope.

It is a clear roadmap for moving forward. It provides a solid foundation from which nations can – and must – launch a diplomatic process to negotiate a nuclear weapons ban treaty. We cannot afford to delay such action indefinitely, simply because a handful of nations oppose it.

Consensus, of course, is a worthy aspiration. But too often “consensus” is invoked or imposed purely with the intent of preventing progress. It affords great power to a small number of states that are out of kilter with the mainstream of the international community.

As many delegations have observed during this debate, nuclear weapons remain the only weapons of mass destruction not yet prohibited by an international legal instrument. We must work expeditiously to fill this unacceptable legal gap.

Palau is under no illusion that a treaty banning nuclear weapons would lead to their elimination “overnight” – but it *would* put us on the right track and propel us closer to that goal.

If the nuclear-armed states refuse to participate in the negotiating process, we must accept that. We cannot *compel* them to engage. But we must not feel powerless to act without their endorsement. It is time for the nuclear-free majority to assert itself more confidently.

Palau is convinced that a ban on nuclear weapons – even without the nuclear-armed states on board – has great potential to change the international landscape on nuclear weapons in a fundamental way by establishing clear new norms. A prohibited weapon very quickly loses its status and any perception of legitimacy.

Mr. Chair,

Palau warmly welcomes the three conferences held since 2013 on the catastrophic humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons, as well as the resolution put forth by Austria affirming the findings of these conferences. Palau welcomes the Humanitarian Pledge and associated resolution to stigmatize, ban and eliminate nuclear weapons.

And we add our full support to South Africa's resolution on the "ethical imperatives" to achieve a nuclear-weapon-free world. As Pope Francis remarked in his address to the General Assembly last month: Not only is it immoral to *use* nuclear weapons; it is immoral also to possess them.

We note the two proposals for an open-ended working group to take forward nuclear disarmament. Any such body should have a clear mandate to negotiate a ban on nuclear weapons and must not be bound by consensus rules. The time for "discussions" and the elaboration of yet more recommendations is over. We must start work now on a new treaty.

Mr. Chair,

For many of us in the Pacific, banning nuclear weapons is a deeply personal mission, as we have experienced first-hand the utter devastation wrought by these monstrous instruments of war. Without our consultation or consent, over the course of half a century, our region suffered from more than three hundred nuclear test explosions – some with yields of several megatons.

These nuclear test explosions poisoned our atolls, lagoons and the vast Pacific Ocean, on which we all depend for our livelihood. They exposed our people to high levels of radiation, resulting in ailments that we had never before experienced. They displaced our people from their ancestral homes, forever disconnecting them from their cultural and indigenous way of life.

We are not content to remain the unwitting victims of others' disregard. We ask you to take heed of our urgent plea to ban nuclear weapons, which would free up vast resources to address climate change impacts and challenges, and to attain the Sustainable Development Goals. It would provide the foundations for a more peaceful, just world for all peoples.

As we move towards the start of negotiations on a nuclear weapons ban treaty, I hope that the voices of those most affected by the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons – including the people of the Pacific – will be at the fore of the debate.

Thank you.