

Informal General Assembly Meeting to Mark the Inaugural International Day against Nuclear Tests

New York, NY

September 9, 2010

On Thursday, September 9, the General Assembly held an informal meeting to mark the International Day against Nuclear Tests. The adoption by the General Assembly of Res 64/35, put forth by the Republic of Kazakhstan, recognized August 29 as the official International Day against Nuclear Tests. This date is symbolic as 18 years ago, the then-President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, closed one of the largest nuclear test facilities in the world at Semipalatinsk.

The General Assembly affirmed its commitment to eliminating nuclear testing once and for all through multilateral and UN-based negotiations. Statements were issued by President of the General Assembly Ali Abdussalam Treki, Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan Kairat Umarov, the Executive Secretary of the Preparatory Commission of the CTBTO (Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organization) Tibor Toth, and Geoffrey Shaw representative of the IAEA. Each panelist expressed his hope for a world free of nuclear weapons beginning with an end to all nuclear testing and full entry-into-force of the CTBT, a treaty which Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon described as the “linchpin” of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. The mission and government of Kazakhstan were recognized for leadership to abolish nuclear testing. Mr. Shaw of the IAEA promised technical assistance and radiological examinations to member states. Ambassador Toth encouraged an all-inclusive and democratic nuclear monitoring system. Ambassador Treki, the current president of the GA, recognized that, “By celebrating the International Day against Nuclear Tests, together with civil society, academia, and the media, Member States can also seize this opportunity to renew their commitments in promoting the ultimate goal of a nuclear weapons free world.”

Following the panel presentation, there was a viewing of a documentary film entitled, “Embrace a World Free of Nuclear Weapons,” sponsored and produced by the Permanent Mission of Kazakhstan. The film provided an historical synopsis of the how nuclear testing and the general nuclear debate have changed since the conclusion of the Cold War, with particular attention given to the 2006 and 2009 nuclear tests carried out by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.

The final portion of the informal meeting featured an open floor discussion among Member States. Cuba, Belgium (representing the entire European Union), Japan, Egypt, South Africa, New Zealand, Ukraine, Turkey, Iran, Brazil, Morocco, the Philippines and Peru all offered statements. Most were standard reiterations of Member State’s previous positions on nuclear testing and the role of nuclear weapons in international security. However, there were some interesting moments. The Cuban representative proposed allocating half of all military expenditures to a fund managed by the UN for economic and

social programs as well as the adoption of a Global Action Plan for eliminating all nuclear weapons over the next 15 years. The Belgium representative reiterated EU support for ratification of the CTBT both to strengthen nuclear monitoring and to deter proliferation. South Africa stated that nuclear weapons are part of an out-dated Cold War mindset and are now used only to assert “the primacy of some states over others.” On a regional note, Egypt offered insight into the proposed Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (NWFZ) in the Middle East and referenced a major conference on this subject to be held in 2012. The Islamic Republic of Iran focused on the negative impacts to the environment of nuclear testing and more specifically to the dangers facing citizens of countries near the sites where testing might occur. Iran pointed out that Israel is a non-party to the NPT that has refused to renounce possession of a nuclear arsenal that, though not formally recognized by Israel, is believed to exist by most of the rest of the world. Peru affirmed the need to preserve the peaceful uses of nuclear energy as well as using that energy to help fight poverty. Peru also noted that Latin America was also the first region to become a NWFZ.

GAPW (through our partnership with the Lawyers Committee on Nuclear Policy) joins with most of the international community in embracing a world free of nuclear weapons. However, political obstacles including resistance by the P5 have made the path toward total nuclear disarmament a difficult one. The event to commemorate the success of the international community in eliminating nuclear testing is simply one more stage on the path to global zero.