Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Mr Chairman,

On behalf of Executive Secretary Lassina Zerbo, allow me to first congratulate you on your election as chair of the First Committee of the 69th session of the United Nations General Assembly. I wish to also express my appreciation to High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Angela Kane for convening this important exchange. I am particularly pleased to be addressing this committee on the sub-theme of Increasing Capacities to Address Weapons of Mass Destruction.

As has been reported to this committee in its past sessions, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) has reinforced the international norm against nuclear testing to a degree where any violation of this norm is immediately met with universal condemnation at the highest level. Though the CTBT has not yet entered into force, with one notable exception the Treaty has succeeded in keeping the world nuclear test free for more than 15 years.

The permanent cessation of nuclear testing has been a goal of the international community for a generation, and we are closer now than ever to finally closing the book on this dangerous and destabilizing, yet once commonplace, practice.

The strength of the non-testing norm, and the well-understood consequences for a State that would surely accompany any violation of this norm, provides a deterrent factor that has helped to prevent both the horizontal proliferation of nuclear weapons, as well as the vertical proliferation of more sophisticated and deadly nuclear weapons among the nuclear-armed States.

We must acknowledge the role that the Treaty’s verification regime has played in this process. The non-testing norm does not exist in a vacuum. In order for States to have the necessary confidence to adhere to the CTBT, there need to be credible assurances of compliance with the provisions of the Treaty by all States. This is multilateral arms control in its purest form, the very tenet of cooperative security in international relations. A credible and trustworthy verification system to monitor compliance with the Treaty, paired with a reliable enforcement mechanism, is a baseline requirement for any State contemplating its ratification of the Treaty.

Therefore, with the technical and financial support of its Member States, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO) for nearly two decades has been assiduously building up the
Treaty’s International Monitoring System (IMS), which is now almost 90% complete. Though the system is not yet fully complete, the detection threshold of the IMS today has proven to be well below what was originally envisaged by the Treaty negotiators.

The IMS is the most sophisticated and expansive global multilateral arms control monitoring system ever conceived, and represents more than a one billion dollar investment by Member States in the furtherance of international peace and security.

The capabilities of the verification system have been demonstrated time and time again. The successful detection of all the announced nuclear tests by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea are testament to this fact. The system has also proven its value in improving response capabilities to international disasters, as in the case of tsunami early warning and the tracking of radionuclide dispersion during the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant accident.

Moreover, the development and testing of the technologies and techniques to be utilized in the Treaty’s on-site inspection (OSI) regime are well underway. The Integrated Field Exercise 2014 starting next month in Jordan will serve as a major benchmark in assessing the readiness of the Treaty’s OSI capabilities. Upon the Treaty’s entry into force, this final verification measure will provide credible assurances that no State could be confident in carrying out a clandestine nuclear test in violation of the Treaty.

These capabilities represent an unparalleled return on investment for our Member States – an investment that must be protected if the objectives of the Treaty are to be fulfilled. The CTBTO aims to achieve this on the technical side by maintaining and completing the verification regime, while working hard to build technical competencies across all Member States.

Technical capacity building is essential, especially for developing countries. It not only creates value for some States that may not see the immediate benefits of adhering to the Treaty or participating fully in the establishment of its verification regime, but also builds a knowledge base in the scientific and technical aspects of the Treaty that will strengthen its implementation and enforcement. All of this comes together in our series of global Science and Technology Conferences, which help keep our regime at the cutting edge of verification science.

More broadly, the work we do in outreach and education to policymakers, academics, civil society, and the media through our integrated capacity-building approach also helps to protect the investment made in the verification regime.

However, this should not be the work of the organisation alone. A growing risk to this investment is “treaty fatigue”. Even with 183 States Signatories and 163 ratifications secured, the longer it takes for the Treaty to enter into force, the more our common investment is at risk. As time continues to pass without substantial progress towards EIF, there is an increased likelihood that that States will not be inclined to honour their commitments to the Treaty and to the organization.

The consequences of the CTBT unravelling in this manner are very grave indeed. Not only would this see the end of an equitable verification regime that has all but ended nuclear explosions in this century, it would have a disastrous effect on efforts to promote disarmament and curtail the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Now, more than ever, leadership is needed. I turn especially to the eight remaining States listed in Annex 2 of the Treaty, whose ratifications are required for entry into force. In this regard, it has been encouraging to see the United States clearly demonstrate its commitment to achieving this through unprecedented political, technical and financial support for the CTBTO and the buildup of the verification regime. In recent discussions with Secretaries Kerry and Moniz, as well as with a number of high-ranking officials, the Executive Secretary was left in no doubt of US intentions to promote ratification of the CTBT.
Likewise, recent engagement with China and Israel gives reason for cautious optimism. The Executive Secretary’s first visit to China last year was a notable milestone. With the backing of Minister Wang Yi, China decided to provide data from its monitoring stations to the CTBTO. This was a major step forward, which brings us closer to the completion of the verification regime, improves our detection capabilities in the region, and enhances overall confidence in the system.

As we reach out to these and other Annex 2 States, we also continue to work with other Member States towards full universalization of the Treaty. Each new ratification – the most recent being that of the Republic of the Congo just last month – helps secure the future of the CTBT.

As noted in the Chair’s concept note for this meeting, the success of our common endeavour requires continued mobilization of personnel, and resources as well as cooperation from Governments, various agencies, civil society and other actors. I would add that real governmental leadership also means never missing an opportunity to present the case for non-proliferation and disarmament. All too often, chances are not seized and potential connections are not made. In the case of the CTBT, missed opportunities serve to foster treaty fatigue. More generally, they may give rise to cynicism on the international community’s commitment to building a safer, more secure, world.

I look forward to discussing possible approaches to enhancing our common efforts to increase capacities in the field of non-proliferation and disarmament of weapons of mass destruction.

Thank you.