
Mr. Chairman,

It is my distinct pleasure to deliver this statement on behalf of the Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Tonga, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and my own country, Fiji.

And since this is the first time Mr. Chairman our Group is addressing your Committee, allow me to convey our Group’s congratulations to you on your election as Chair and we are confident with you at the helm, the Committee will see its duties to fruition and finality. Allow me to also express our confidence in your Bureau and to convey are congratulations to them further on their elections to their various posts.

Mr. Chairman,

Having experienced first-hand the devastating humanitarian impact of nuclear testing in the Pacific, we are committed to finding genuine and durable solutions so that nuclear weapons are never used again, under any circumstance.

For half a century, from 1946 to 1996, more than 315 nuclear test explosions were carried out in our neighbouring countries of Kiribati, French Polynesia, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands, covering our region with radioactive fallout and rendering entire atolls permanently uninhabitable.

Earlier this year, we marked 60 years since the “Bravo” test at Bikini Atoll in my country – the largest nuclear test ever conducted, with a blast one thousand times more powerful than that of the atomic bomb that was detonated in Hiroshima, Japan.

Villagers living on nearby and downwind islands, as well as nuclear test site workers, suffered most severely from this and at other nuclear tests in the Pacific region. The immediate health effects included skin burns, hair loss, finger discolouration, nausea, and other symptoms of acute radiation poisoning.
We also note with concern the Secretary-General's Report A/68/198 of 25 July 2014 pursuant to General Assembly resolution 68/93 in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General in cooperation with relevant UN specialized agencies to compile a report on "the environmental, ecological, health and other impacts of the 30-year period of nuclear testing in French Polynesia." We remain skeptical of the overall conclusion of the IAEA study on residual radiological conditions of the atolls of Murorua and Fangataufa in French Polynesia, which suggests that the "expected radiation dose rates and modes of exposure were such that no effects on biotic population groups could arise." It essentially states, inter alia, that there would be no changes in cancer incidence rates in the South Pacific region attributable to radiation exposure from the residual radioactive material in the Murorua and Fangataufa Atolls.

However, the Special Rapporteur on the implications for the human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes in a report A/HRC/21/48/Add.1, para. 9 to the Human Rights Council noted that "people in territories where countries conducted nuclear testing programmes, including French Polynesia, were affected by nuclear testing programmes." In paragraph 20 of the same report, it notes that "any increase in the dose of radiation, however, minute, would result in a proportionate increase in the risk of cancer."

Today, our communities still suffer from the long-term impacts of the tests, experiencing higher rates of cancer, particularly thyroid cancer, due to exposure to radiation. In some places, the environment and food sources remain highly contaminated. In addition, many of our peoples have been dislocated from their homes and disconnected from their indigenous way of life. These impacts were recognized in 2012 by the UN Special Rapporteur for toxic waste, who framed the impacts in the case of the Republic of the Marshall Islands as a serious human rights issue.

Mr. Chairman,

With this history in mind, we welcome the renewed focus of the international community on the horrendous humanitarian impact of the use and testing of nuclear weapons. The landmark Oslo and Nayarit conferences proved, beyond doubt, that urgent and united action is needed to avert a humanitarian catastrophe of unprecedented proportions.

As long as nuclear weapons exist, there is a very real danger that one day, these weapons of mass destruction will be used again, whether by design or accident. Halting the spread of nuclear weapons to other states or to non-state actors is not enough; we must also eliminate all existing nuclear weapons as outlined in General Assembly resolution 68/51.

As you may be aware Mr. Chairman, the Republic of the Marshall Islands is taking action before the International Court of Justice aimed at holding all nuclear-armed states to account for their failure to engage in good-faith negotiations for nuclear disarmament, as required by the Non-
Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and customary international law. The Pacific SIDS are following this case with interest.

Together, we must find new ways to realize, at long last, the NPT’s two core objectives. The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty has brought us one step closer to that goal. So, too, have the various regional nuclear-weapon-free zone treaties, including the Treaty of Rarotonga covering the South Pacific Ocean. But additional legal instruments are also needed -- The first of which needs to be a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty.

Mr. Chairman,

Nuclear-armed states must take appropriate measures to reduce the risk of an accidental or unauthorized launch of nuclear weapons and to make sure that nuclear weapons and dirty bombs do not fall in the hands of terrorist groups, and we call on all states that have not yet done so to accede to the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and to subscribe to the Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation and to join the NPT as non-nuclear weapon states.

We call upon nuclear-weapon States to undertake further efforts to reduce and ultimately eliminate all types of nuclear weapons, deployed and non-deployed, including through unilateral, bilateral, regional and multilateral measures.

The total elimination of nuclear weapons is an essential part of our broader perspective, to protect our fragile environment for the benefit of all future generations, and to reallocate precious resources away from defence matters, and towards sustainable development.

Mr. Chairman,

Finally, we look forward to the forthcoming conference in Vienna on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons and hope that it will achieve tangible progress.

Thank you.