

REPUBLIC OF PALAU

Statement to the Preparatory Committee of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

May 2, 2014

**Delivered by H.E. Dr. Caleb Otto,
Permanent Representative of Palau to the United Nations**

Mr. Chairman,

Thank you for giving me the floor.

As this is the first time Palau takes the floor, please allow me, at the onset, to join the others in congratulating you on your appointment as Chairman of this session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2015 NPT Review Conference. We pledge our support to you.

Palau is committed to global efforts to outlaw and eliminate nuclear weapons. We are proud to be the first nation to have adopted a nuclear-free constitution, which forbids the stationing of nuclear weapons in our nation.

As a Pacific Island nation, we have a particular interest in seeing nuclear weapons eliminated. Our region has experienced first-hand the devastating impact of decades of US, British and French nuclear testing, as we have heard from the distinguished Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Marshall Islands, the Honorable Tony deBrum.

Only by eliminating nuclear weapons can we guarantee that they will never be used again – whether through tests, accidents or acts of war.

Mr. Chairman,

It is clear that the Non-Proliferation Treaty faces serious challenges.

More than four decades since the treaty's entry into force, close to 17,000 nuclear weapons remain in the world, and all five NPT nuclear-weapon states are investing heavily in upgrades to their nuclear arsenals.

For this reason, we warmly welcome the recent initiative of the Marshall Islands to hold all nine nuclear-armed states to account for their failure to comply with their legal obligation to disarm.

But the nuclear problem also extends beyond these nine states. Five NPT parties continue to host US nuclear weapons on their territory, and many more claim a security benefit from the threat of use of nuclear weapons.

As recent discussions on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons have demonstrated, any use of these ultimate weapons of mass destruction would be catastrophic and long-lasting.

We commend Norway and Mexico for hosting recent conferences on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons, and we welcome Austria's offer to host a third conference on this topic later this year.

Palau believes that the time has come for a new diplomatic process to negotiate a legally binding instrument to ban nuclear weapons – even if the nuclear-armed states are unwilling to join such a process.

By banning nuclear weapons outright, we would devalue and stigmatize them, which is necessary if we are to succeed in eliminating them.

As the chair of the recent Nayarit conference remarked, the prohibition of weapons typically precedes their elimination.

A nuclear weapons ban treaty would put nuclear weapons on the same legal footing as chemical and biological weapons, which have been clearly prohibited.

It would complement the NPT, just as the CTBT and regional nuclear-weapon-free zone treaties do.

A ban treaty is the first vital next step in our collective efforts to eliminate nuclear weapons, which pose an unacceptable threat to all humanity.

Secondly, we need to work on the root causes for existence of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction, and these are the need for power over others, desires to annihilate others and unwillingness to work for peace.

Every nation has a stake in achieving a nuclear-weapon-free world. In addition to the Marshall Islands, other nations in the Pacific, and the world, too have been touched by the devastation of nuclear weapons testing.

While in Palau we have no capacity to conduct medical analysis of the current increase in the incidence of various forms of cancer, especially cancer of the thyroid, due to our geographical location being between Japan and the Marshall Islands and Mururoa Atolls of French Polynesia, we are wondering if we are not now reaping the effects of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima and Nagasaki as well as the nuclear testing to the east and south of us.

We believe that we could be affected by radioactivity in either the air we breathe or through the food chain in both land and sea. At this point, may we express our appreciation to Ireland for their contribution to support cancer therapy, as announced by the distinguished delegate this week.

Mr. Chairman

Like the Republic of the Marshall Islands we have been supporting efforts for a nuclear-free Pacific and we are encouraged that the United States has provided a new perspective on the Rarotonga Treaty's Protocols.

We join the Marshall Islands in expressing again our aspirations for a Pacific and, indeed, a world free of nuclear weapons.

Palau is ready to join a diplomatic process to ban nuclear weapons once and for all.

Thank you for your kind attention.