

REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS



STATEMENT BY H.E. MR. PHILLIP H. MULLER,
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PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS
TO THE UNITED NATIONS, AT THE 2010 REVIEW CONFERENCE OF THE
PARTIES TO THE TREATY ON THE NON-PROLIFERATION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS
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Mr. President, Excellencies,

Mr. President, I wish to congratulate you on your election as Chair, and we look forward to a productive – and truly significant – Review Conference.

Mr. President,

The Republic of the Marshall Islands associates itself with the statement delivered by Minister Smith of Australia on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum.

The Republic of the Marshall Islands, during its time as a UN Trust Territory, experienced 67 large-scale surface tests of nuclear weapons. At the time of testing, and on every possible occasion in the intervening years, the Marshall Islands has informed UN members of the devastating impacts of these tests -- of the deliberate use of our people as unwitting scientific experiments, of ongoing health impacts inherited through generations, of our displaced populations who still live in exile or who were resettled in unsafe circumstances, and then had to be removed. Even today, science remains a moving target and our exiled local communities are still struggling with resettlement.

We are burdened by a large nuclear waste storage facility at low-lying Runit Island which sits only meters from the surrounding – and rising – ocean, and we lack the capacity, expertise or resources to address the long-term care of this site. As we – the United Nations – map a global future of non-proliferation, the past legacy of nuclear activities can no longer be ignored, and the fiduciary responsibility to address these impacts should be acknowledged.

In NPT Review Conferences in 1995 – and again in 2000 – member states recognized that a special responsibility exists towards former UN Trust Territories adversely affected by weapons tests conducted under the auspices of the UN. In both meetings, member states explicitly recognized the need for safe resettlement of displaced communities, to restore economic productivity, and agreed that consideration should be given by all governments and international organizations for requested assistance in the remediation and disposal.¹

We will again expect the support of all member states in supporting this previously-agreed text, which recognizes the special responsibility which exists towards former UN Trust Territories.

We acknowledge important actions already taken to date with the former UN administrator – the United States – to address the legacy and contemporary impacts of nuclear testing, and we acknowledge ongoing bilateral discourse to address unresolved issues – much remains to be accomplished. But these tests were also conducted with the explicit authorization of UN members in Trusteeship Resolutions 1082 (adopted in 1954) and 1493 (adopted in 1956). At that time, the UN did not honor petitions by traditional Marshallese leaders to halt testing.

¹ See NPT/CONF.2000/PC.II/35, Para 23.

But this treaty – and this review meeting – is not about the Marshall Islands. Perhaps we have one of the most important stories to tell regarding the need to avert the use of nuclear weapons – but we tell that story in the context of urging a strong international outcome from this meeting, and in urging member states to take firm, legally binding and internationally-verifiable efforts to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons. It should be our collective goal as the United Nations to stop the spread of nuclear weapons and to pursue the peace and security of a world without them.

Mr. President,

The Republic of the Marshall Islands has recently ratified the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, and we urge other member states to work towards bringing an entry into force of this important agreement.

Mr. President,

We are alarmed that, although almost all NPT members are achieving obligations, there are a small few who appear to be determined to violate the rules which bind them, and whose actions thus far appear evasive, particularly in testing or assembling nuclear weapons. We have no tolerance for anything less than strict adherence by Parties to their legal obligations under the NPT – we urge, and we expect, an appropriate international response. But most importantly, we seek the resolution of these issues through a means which ensures a more safe and secure world, and ensures compliance with the NPT. This is not an issue of block politics; it is an issue of collective international security.

Mr. President,

The Marshall Islands is not the only nation in the Pacific to be touched by the devastation of nuclear weapon testing.

The support of the Republic of the Marshall Islands for a nuclear-free Pacific has long been clouded by other treaty obligations. With this week's announcement of a new perspective by the US, we are closely examining our own position on the Rarotonga Treaty, and express our eventual aspirations to join with our Pacific neighbors in supporting a Pacific free of nuclear weapons in a manner consistent with international security.

Mr. President,

We strongly affirm and welcome the important recent progress made by the United States and Russia in the resumed START treaty, and recognize the new US commitments under the Nuclear Posture review to rule out the development of new weapons, and to refuse use of weapons against compliant NPT parties. We recognize the significance of the recent international meeting in Washington, DC, and urge nuclear weapons states to intensify efforts to address their responsibilities in moving towards an effective and secure disarmament.

Mr. President,

The Marshallese people should be the very first group to alert the United Nations to our deeper purpose – one that transcends technical jargon. No nation – and no people – should ever bear witness to the burden of the exposure to the devastating impacts nuclear weapons.

We suffer the ongoing burden and legacy of nuclear exposure because of decisions made in a very distant United Nations – not unlike the very decisions before us at this meeting. The UN cannot – and must not – repeat such mistakes; we must rise to take on the challenge of international courage.