



**G-77 and China statement during the 56th session of Working Group B, 8-19 March 2021,
delivered by H. E. Ambassador Alejandro Solano Ortiz, Permanent Representative of Costa Rica**

Mr. Chairman,

1. The Group of 77 and China is pleased to see you, Mr M. Sergey Berezin, conducting our work in this 56th Session of Working Group B together with the Vice-Chairs and Task Leaders, and would like to assure you of its full cooperation and support.
2. The Group is pleased to note that the decision on the appointment of the Chairperson of WGB was reached in a consensual manner that respects the principle of geographical rotation. The Group would like to commend Ambassador Juan Francisco Facetti from Paraguay and Ms Anne Strommen Lycke from Norway who graciously withdrew their candidatures in favour of the consensus.
3. We would also like to thank Dr. Lassina Zerbo, the Executive Secretary, for his opening remarks and take note of his report on verification related activities for the period from July to December 2020. The Group also takes note of the documents prepared for this session by the Provisional Technical Secretariat's (PTS).

Mr. Chairman,

4. The Group is pleased to note that since our last meeting, two members of our Group, Cuba and the Union of the Comoros, have ratified the CTBT, bringing the number of State Signatories to 185 and of Ratifiers to 170. The Group commends Cuba's and the Union of the Comoros's decisions. The Group also stresses the need of an early Entry Into Force of the CTBT and underlines the need for all possible efforts to achieve the universalization of the Treaty. with the ultimate goal to eliminate nuclear weapons and general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.
5. The Group reiterates its principled position on the importance of sustaining a balanced approach, including in allocating resources and time, among the three Major Programmes of the verification regime, namely the International Monitoring System (IMS), the International Data Centre (IDC) and On-Site Inspection (OSI). To this end, it calls once more on the PTS to seek the necessary efficiencies in the process, to ensure that the verification regime of the Treaty, upon entry into force, is balanced, coherent, as well as robust while efficient.

Mr. Chairman,

6. On specific verification related activities conducted by the PTS, as contained in the Executive Secretary's report, the Group would like to make the following remarks:
 - a. The Group notes the continuous progress, within the provisional operational nature of the IMS, as reported by the PTS, on the joint efforts of the States hosting IMS facilities, local operator and the PTS. The Group also notes that the data availability of certified IMS stations remained high and automated products of the IDC met the timeliness requirements more than 99% of the time.

b. Regarding the IMS, the Group takes note of the activities undertaken by the PTS during the reporting period, in particular the progress achieved regarding the installations and certification of remaining Stations in developing countries, which illustrates the strong political commitment and material contributions of developing countries to the work of this Organization. The Group further takes note that during the reporting period, the total number of installed stations is 297 (92.5%) and the number of certified stations is 288 (89.7%) with two new IMS stations certified.

c. On the management of life-cycle costs, including post-certification activity (PCA) contracts for certified IMS stations, the Group takes note of the continuous efforts by the PTS to standardize the services provided under PCA contracts and reiterates its call on all States Signatories to cooperate with the PTS in a joint effort to lower life cycle costs, including those related to PCA.

d. The Group would like to affirm that any activities related to the funding, maintenance, and provisional operation of the IMS stations by the PTS, and any related action or decision by the Prepcom, must respect the territorial integrity of states.

e. The Group looks forward to finalizing direct and clear guidance for noble gas background characterization, as a matter of priority at the next session of the PrepCom and appreciates the work carried out by the Co-facilitators Ambassador Molekane and Ambassador Laggner, as per the mandate outlined by the PrepCom, in this regard. The Group stresses that the postponement of the deadline for this decision is directly linked to the temporary changes in the format and modality of meetings of the PrepCom in light of the COVID-19 crisis.

f. Regarding the International Data Center Progressive Commissioning, the Group takes note of The technical (online) meeting held by the PTS during 13-16 October 2020 with the objective to continue the process of completing the Validation and Acceptance Test Plan (VATP) of the International Data Centre (IDC), the International Monitoring System (IMS) and the GCI of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO). The Group would like to emphasize the importance of continued involvement of experts in conducting the experiments, including the participation of experts from developing countries. The Group looks forward to further briefings on the progressive commissioning of the IMS and the IDC, the validation and acceptance test plan and the experiments conducted and planned by the PTS, noting that the milestones for progressive commission are not time bound and are requirement-based. The Group further believes that the evaluation report should include how past identified performance shortfalls were addressed the assessment report on the four experiments, the plan for the 2021 experiment and update of the VATP for future experiments. The Group also requests that the PTS considers introducing provisions in the VATP to measure the quality of IDC in fulfilling the verification objectives and test the provisions in the next set of experiments.

g. The Group takes note of the progress made under the OSI action plan for 2016-2019, that completed all 43 projects by the end of 2019 and the OSI strategic policy and the 2020- 2021 Programme and Budget. The Group takes note of the postponement of several preparatory activities such as a communications field test, host country training, site preparations and the conduct of both field BUEs, originally planned for June and September 2020 as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic and movement restrictions and looks forward to a successful conduct of the exercise initial phase (BUE-IN) and BUE continuation phase, as soon as conditions permit.

h. On the Radionuclide Monitoring System, the Group takes note of the continued work on the completion of ongoing installation and certification projects and the implementation of a major upgrade and revalidation, which is carried out with Signatory States. The Group looks forward to the successful conduct

of the 2021 Proficiency Test Exercise for noble gas samples, scheduled for the first quarter of 2021 and requests the PTS to ensure participation of all interested States Signatories in the test.

Mr. Chairman,

7. The Group would like to highlight the importance of capacity building activities, especially through technical trainings, workshops and capacity building courses, and expresses its appreciation for the PTS's efforts to continue providing and expanding capacity-building activities despite COVID-19 pandemic and movement restrictions, through organizing online workshops and trainings. We reaffirm the continuing need for cooperation and support, including the provision of technical assistance to, inter alia, ensure that all States Signatories, in particular developing countries, have the capacity to effectively participate in the verification regime of the Treaty, and implement obtained knowledge and capacities at the national, regional and international levels.

8. The Group expresses its support for projects, such as the pilot project that facilitate the participation of experts from developing countries in the WGB sessions in 2021, which resulted in the selection of 13 new experts from developing countries in addition to the eight re-nominated experts and looks forward to enlarging the participation of experts in virtual meetings of the WGB. The Group is convinced that such participation will greatly contribute to capacity building in our countries.

9. Cognizant of the exceptional circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and because of the technical and substantive nature of the issues under the agenda of the work of this technical Working Group of the 56th session of WGB, and due to the lack of ability of virtual meetings to induce enough interactions between delegations, the Group suggests that the Agenda of this session of the WGB be streamlined to cover the most salient and must-do items, and discussions on substantive issues and documents that need to take some sort of decisions, be deferred to the next session of the WGB, when in person participation of the technical experts of delegation would be possible. The Group emphasizes that the informal technical consultations and expert group discussions conducted under the draft agenda item 6 should be strictly procedural when reflected in the WGB report of this session. In this regard, the Group reiterates that WGB report for its 56th session must be procedural, focusing on business continuity, and duly considered by technical experts from States Signatories.

10. As part of its integrated capacity building activities, the Commission has to continue offering States Signatories, in particular developing States, a wide range of training courses and workshops aimed at strengthening capacities in areas relevant to the Treaty. Capacity building activities should also include the provision of hardware and software to NDCs, especially those in developing countries, enabling them to access and analyze IMS data and International Data Centre (IDC) products.

11. The Group reaffirms its principles of equitable geographical distribution and gender balance and reiterates that these principles should be reflected in the PrepCom and its subsidiary bodies. In this regard, we encourage Working Group B to contribute to improving such representation among its officers in accordance with the abovementioned principles.

Mr Chairman,

12. Finally, the Group looks forward to continue working constructively with you, the Vice-Chairs and the Task Leaders in order to achieve a fruitful outcome of this session.

Thank you.