



Statement of the Group of 77 and China during 56th Session of the Preparatory Commission, 21-22 June 2021, delivered by H.E. Ambassador Alejandro Solano Ortiz, Permanent Representative of Costa Rica

Mr. Chairperson,

1. I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.
2. The Group of 77 and China is pleased to see you, Ambassador Ivo Sramek, chairing the 56th Session of the Preparatory Commission (PrepCom). The Group takes this opportunity to renew to you, Ambassador, the assurances of its full support and cooperation. Furthermore, the Group expresses its full support to the PrepCom in executing its tasks in the most efficient and effective manner.
3. The Group would like to thank Dr. Lassina Zerbo for his opening remarks and dedication to the Commission in the past eight years. As Executive Secretary, Dr. Zerbo's tenure has been marked by the successful promotion of the treaty, promotion of capacity building especially for developing countries, the excellent management of the organisation and the enhancement of its stature as an International Organisation. The Group appreciates, in particular, the initiatives to promote capacity building and training and believes that such activities will be further improved by the elected Executive Secretary. The Group wishes Dr. Lassina Zerbo success in his future work.

Mr. Chairman,

4. It is a privilege and an honour for the Group to welcome Dr. Robert Floyd as the new Executive Secretary, initiating his duties in August. The Group would like to assure Dr. Floyd of its continuous cooperation and full support, and wishes him every success for his forthcoming tenure of office.

Mr. Chairman,

5. The Group takes note of the reports of the Executive Secretary and expresses its appreciation to the Provisional Technical Secretariat for preparing documents and making them available for this session in a timely manner.

Mr. Chairman,

6. The Group is deeply saddened by the loss of so many lives globally due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and expresses its solidarity with all countries as they battle with the effects of the pandemic. Cooperation to contain, mitigate and defeat the pandemic, including through a multilateral approach, should be strengthened and intensified. The international community must unite in its efforts to ensure access to scientific guidance, training, equipment, essential medical supplies, and concrete life-saving services to countries in greatest need and in regions where the full impact is yet to be felt. The Group calls upon countries to ensure that their measures will not have a negative impact on the capacity of States to respond efficiently to COVID-19.

7. The Group supports efforts to ensure business continuity in the CTBTO PrepCom and also expresses gratitude to the PTS of all its efforts amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Chairman,

8. The Group wishes to reiterate its full support for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and stresses the need for an early Entry Into Force (EIF) of the CTBT and its universalization, with the ultimate goal of eliminating nuclear weapons, and general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.

9. The Group welcomes the recent ratification of the CTBT by Cuba and the Union of the Comoros, which brings the total number of signatures to 185 States and the ratifications to 170. The Group believes that these developments represent significant steps towards the Universalization of the Treaty. This gives palpable signs of the Group's commitment to achieve the universalization of the Treaty and achieve complete nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

10. The Group looks forward to contributing to all discussions and work in preparation for the, the upcoming Science and Technology Conference 2021, the Article XIV Conference and the 10th NPT Review Conference.

11. The Group expresses its concern on any possible planning and preparation for nuclear test explosions. Any nuclear tests explosion would not only break the global moratorium, but severely undermine the Nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime and international peace and security. The Group calls upon all States to observe nuclear test moratoria and to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to general, complete and irreversible nuclear disarmament under strict and effective international control.

Mr. Chairman,

12. On Agenda item 3, the Group takes note of the report of Working Group A at its 59th session and its recommendations. We would like to thank the Chairperson of WGA, Ambassador Nada Kruger of Namibia, for leading the consultations that preceded the session, as well as for all her efforts in conducting the virtual WGA meeting in order to achieve consensus despite challenges and difficulties caused by the pandemic.

13. The Group takes note of the initial draft 2022-2023 Programme and Budget proposal. The Group has already expressed its initial comments during the last WGA session and looks forward to continuing consultation on that issue.

14. The Group would like to reiterate some points expressed during the last Working Group A session. In this regard, the Group strongly underlines the importance of promoting a balanced approach and appropriate allocation of resources among the three dimensions of the verification regime namely the International Monitoring System, the International Data Centre and On-Site Inspection.

15. The Group welcomed the fact that the External Auditor had declared the financial statements of the CTBTO as a true reflection of the financial position for the 2020 financial year and is ready to accept the 2020 audited financial statements. The Group expresses its appreciation to the External Auditor of the Commission, the Auditor General of the State Audit Office of the Kingdom of Thailand, and notes that its mandate will end with the conclusion of the audit of the 2021 financial statements of the Commission.

16. On agenda item 4, the Group also takes note of the report of the Working Group B at its Fifty-sixth Session and thanks Mr. Erlan Batyrbekov for the introduction of the report.

17. The Group strongly emphasizes the importance it attaches to capacity-building and training and to the various activities carried out by the PTS in this field as a means of improving the ability of States Signatories, in particular developing countries, to fully participate in the Treaty's verification regime. In this regard, the Group expresses its support

for the pilot project, which facilitates the participation of experts from developing countries in the WGB sessions. The Group is convinced that such participation will greatly contribute to capacity-building in our countries. The Group highlights that capacity building activities postponed due to COVID-19 should be rescheduled as soon as circumstances allow.

18. The Group takes note of the recent report of the Advisory Group at its 56th session and appreciates the recommendations contained therein. The Group also reiterates its appreciation for the efforts and expertise of the Advisory Group in providing necessary observation, conclusion, and recommendations on issues related to the associated administrative, budgetary and financial matters.

19. The Group thanks the Chairperson of the Advisory Group, Sir Michael Weston, who has chaired the Group from 2009 to July 2021, and for his excellent stewardship during this long period.

Mr Chairman,

20. 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 as well as in the PTS. In this regard, the Group welcomes the efforts made to improve the representation of the staff, including towards achieving gender balance at the director level of the PTS. The Group takes this opportunity to continue encouraging the Executive Secretary in his efforts to significantly improve the gender balance and the equitable geographical distribution within the organization and at all levels of responsibility, bearing in mind the persistent underrepresentation of developing countries in the staff composition of the PTS, and the need to take appropriate measures to address this issue.

21. The Group expresses its appreciation to the Co-facilitators, Ambassador Molekane from South Africa and Ambassador Laggner from Switzerland, for holding informal consultations on the issue of noble gas background measurement, and their updated report on these consultations. The Group also expresses its appreciation to Ambassador Navarrete from Chile for holding consultations on the issue of non-scheduled sessions of the PrepCom. The Group looks forward to finalizing direct and clear guidance for further activities of the PTS on the issue of noble gas background characterization, as well as finalizing guidelines for holding non-scheduled sessions of the Commission, as a matter of priority at the soonest in-person session of the Commission, and expects the PTS to act in accordance with its mandate, in these regards. The Group stresses that the postponement of the deadlines for those decisions is directly linked to the temporary changes in the format and modality of meetings of the PrepCom in light of the COVID-19 crisis.

22. Finally, the Group of 77 and China looks forward to a constructive deliberation and timely conclusion of the work of this Session of the Preparatory Commission.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.