



MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS



ICRC



## CHAIR'S SUMMARY

### REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE HUMANITARIAN CONSEQUENCES OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND NUCLEAR- WEAPON-FREE-ZONE IN CENTRAL ASIA

*August 29, 2023, Astana  
Hilton Garden Inn hotel, Kabanbai Batyr Avenue, 15*

1. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, in partnership with the Center for International Security and Policy (CISP), Soka Gakkai International (SGI), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), convened a Regional Conference on the Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons and Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in Central Asia in Astana, Kazakhstan on 29 August 2023.
2. Participants included delegates from the five Member States of the Central Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty (Semipalatinsk Treaty), namely Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, as well as representatives of communities affected by nuclear testing, the ICRC, CISP, SGI, and ICAN.
3. H.E. Mr. Kairat Umarov, First Deputy Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, welcomed participants to the conference. In his opening remarks he underscored that upholding the norm against nuclear testing and prevention of consequences of nuclear testing remained an integral part of the collective efforts to achieve and maintain a world without nuclear weapons. Opening remarks were also delivered by Mr. Alimzhan Akhmetov, Director of CISP, Ms. Biljana Milosevic, Head of ICRC Regional Delegation in Tashkent, and Mr. Hirotsugu Terasaki, SGI Director General of Peace and Global Issues.
4. The conference took place on the International Day Against Nuclear Tests, and participants noted the humanitarian and environmental impacts of nuclear testing and explosions in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, as well as in other regions of the world. The negative ecological effects of uranium mining in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were also noted. The importance of international assistance for environmental rehabilitation was noted. Mr. Dmitriy Vesselov, a third-generation Semipalatinsk nuclear-testing survivor, delivered a powerful testimony about the long-term catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons experienced by the

victims of exposure to ionizing radiation, highlighting the health and social conditions passed from generation to generation.

5. The ICRC described how any use of nuclear weapons would cause long-term harm to human health and well-being, as well as long-term damage to the environment, while a large-scale nuclear confrontation would severely impact infrastructure, socio-economic development, and social order. The effects of nuclear weapons could not be constrained by national borders, having a profound impact on States far away from targeted areas, including those belonging to nuclear-weapon-free zones such as Central Asia.
6. The ICRC further stressed that no adequate humanitarian response would be possible in the aftermath of a nuclear attack and that it is extremely doubtful that nuclear weapons could ever be used in accordance with the principles and rules of international humanitarian law, in particular the prohibitions on indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks, the prohibition of superfluous injury and unnecessary suffering, and the rules protecting the natural environment in armed conflict.
7. Participants recalled the destructive history of nuclear warfare in Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of World War II and of nuclear testing across the world, including more than 500 Soviet nuclear tests and explosions in the Central Asian region, as well as the catastrophic consequences and grave risks of further nuclear detonations, as the reason that motivated the negotiation and adoption by 122 States of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) in 2017. They further recalled that annual UN General Assembly resolutions in support of the TPNW have passed with the support of around two-thirds of all UN Member States, including Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.
8. The TPNW entered into force on 22 January 2021, codifying the illegality of nuclear weapons under international law and establishing the first multilateral framework for the total elimination of nuclear weapon programmes. Kazakhstan was among the original 50 States Parties that enabled its entry into force.
9. The TPNW also acknowledges and seeks to redress the harm caused by the use and testing of nuclear weapons. Article 6 of the TPNW calls for victim assistance and environmental remediation, and Article 7 calls for international cooperation and assistance from states parties in a position to provide this. This establishes the first international framework to address these impacts of nuclear weapons, contributing to the body of international law related to nuclear weapons in this regard.
10. Following the first Meeting of States Parties to the TPNW (1MSP) held in Vienna from 21 to 23 June 2022 and the adoption of a series of ambitious decisions, TPNW States Parties established, inter alia, a Working Group on Victim Assistance and Environmental Remediation, co-chaired by Kazakhstan and Kiribati, to advance the work in this area. Progress has been made in 2023 on discussions regarding establishing an international trust fund for victim assistance and environmental remediation, as well as on developing the international framework for implementing these obligations under the TPNW. Participants noted Kazakhstan's co-leadership in advancing this work as a state affected by the impacts of nuclear testing.

11. The conference highlighted the complementarity of the TPNW with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), the Treaty of Semipalatinsk, and other nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation instruments. Participants highlighted the need to further strengthen cooperation between all existing nuclear-weapon-free zones, including the upcoming signing of a memorandum of understanding between the Central Asian Nuclear Weapon Free Zone and the African Commission on Nuclear Energy (AFCONE) and the Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean (OPANAL).
12. The conference welcomed the establishment earlier this year of the International Day for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Awareness on 5 March at the initiative of Kyrgyzstan, and noted the role of disarmament education and awareness-raising in promoting nuclear disarmament.
13. The Treaty of Semipalatinsk, which was signed in Semipalatinsk on 8 September 2006 and entered into force on 21 March 2009, declares Central Asia as nuclear-weapon-free zone. Participants underscored the need for the finalisation of the protocol to the Treaty of Semipalatinsk through the remaining ratification by the United States of America.
14. It was highlighted that the Treaty of Semipalatinsk contains many similar prohibitions to those of the TPNW. It was noted that all Central Asian States already are in full compliance with the prohibitions contained in the TPNW and can adhere to the TPNW without taking on any substantive additional obligations related to the prohibitions. The TPNW shares the goal of the Treaty of Semipalatinsk, aiming to transform this regional norm against the possession of nuclear weapons into a global norm.
15. It was further noted that around three-quarters of all States belonging to regional nuclear-weapon-free zones have already signed and/or ratified the TPNW. Parties to the Treaty of Tlatelolco (covering Latin America and the Caribbean), the Treaty of Rarotonga (covering the South Pacific), and the Treaty of Bangkok (covering Southeast Asia) have especially high rates of adherence to the TPNW.
16. Participants noted Kazakhstan's appointment as President-designate of the third Meeting of States Parties to the TPNW. Member States of the Treaty of Semipalatinsk were encouraged to support Kazakhstan in this endeavour, and in its efforts to represent the Central Asian region's contribution to nuclear disarmament, through attending the second Meeting of States Parties of the TPNW, at least as observers, which will take place at the United Nations Headquarters in New York between 27 November and 1 December this year, and by signing and ratifying the TPNW at the earliest opportunity.