Statement by Mr Genxin Li  
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Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization  

UN First Committee  
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Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,  

Mr Chairman,  

On behalf of Executive Secretary Lassina Zerbo, I would like to first congratulate you on your election as chair of the First Committee of 68th Session of the United Nations General Assembly. Allow me to also express my gratitude to High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Angela Kane for convening this important exchange.  

I would also like to congratulate the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) for being awarded the prestigious Nobel Peace Prize. As stated by Executive Secretary Zerbo, this award is a well-deserved recognition of the capable leadership of the OPCW and the dedicated efforts of its staff to seek the elimination of an entire category of weapons of mass destruction.  

Mr Chairman,  

The First Committee is tasked with the special responsibility of advancing disarmament and strengthening international security. The solutions to the myriad challenges that we face in furthering these objectives will not be easily identified or quickly attained. Yet the complexity of these challenges must not lead to complacency and inaction, lest our global institutions seeking international peace and prosperity wither on the vine.  

The basic principles of cooperation and dialogue have always guided the United Nations in seeking solutions to the challenges facing the international security regime. It is through in depth exchanges between Member States, International and Regional Organizations, and civil society at large that this Committee must forge agreement on concrete actions to effectively deal with many of these challenges. For this reason, we embrace the format of this high-level exchange, and hope that it could be further developed to achieve our shared goals.  

Mr Chairman,  

This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the entry into force of the Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT), negotiated between the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and the United States in the aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis.
Addressing the American public in July 1963 on the recently concluded PTBT, US President John F Kennedy recalled an ancient Chinese proverb: *A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step.* “Let us, if we can”, he continued, “step back from the shadows of war and seek out the way of peace. And if that journey is a thousand miles, or even more, let history record that we...took the first step.”

The conclusion of the PTBT represented the first occasion that the Cold War adversaries were able to come together and successfully negotiate an agreement with the sole aim of prohibiting nuclear weapons related activities. This first step, though limited in scope, was a step away from the scourge of war and toward peace and security.

Likewise, the adoption of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) by the General Assembly in 1996 represented a crucial step in the efforts to reduce and eventually eliminate the threats posed by nuclear weapons. Constituting an integral element of the nuclear disarmament framework, the Treaty and its unprecedented global verification regime demonstrate that multilaterally verifiable arms control is not only possible and effective, but also necessary for advancing international peace and security.

With its non-discriminatory and equal obligations on all States, the CTBT is a strong instrument of fair and just multilateralism. Furthermore, the CTBT helps generate trust and build confidence, which are essential for increasing cooperation in the international environment, and serve as necessary conditions for enhancing security and stability in the world.

We have achieved great success in the build-up of the Treaty’s verification regime in the last decade. With 337 monitoring facilities and 250 communication assets, the International Monitoring System has truly global reach and is close to 90% complete. We’ve proven that the Treaty is verifiable through an international monitoring system that is unique, reliable and efficient. And we’ve built a deterrent that gives States peace of mind.

Boasting 183 States Signatories and 161 ratifying States - including the recent ratifications by Iraq and Guinea Bissau - the CTBT has been instrumental in solidifying the international consensus against nuclear testing. However, there are still eight Annex 2 States that must ratify the Treaty before it enters into force. While we should acknowledge the great strides that have been made towards this goal, our work is not yet done. Challenges to the non-testing norm persist.

In February, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) carried out its third announced nuclear test. Even with a comparatively small estimated yield, the event was detected by 94 IMS seismic stations and 2 infrasound stations. In addition, fifty-five days after the announced DPRK nuclear test, Xenon 133 and 133m were detected at a Noble gas station in Japan. The detections and their ratios, when combined with atmospheric transport modelling, were consistent with a late release of the gasses from the DPRK test site.

While highlighting the urgent need for the early entry into force of the Treaty, the international condemnation of this event underlined the normative strength of the Treaty and its contribution to the efforts to eliminate the threats posed by nuclear weapons.
We have also witnessed a revitalization of the global will to legally codify the ban on nuclear testing in recent weeks. During the Conference on Facilitating the Entry into Force of the CTBT (Article XIV Conference), Foreign Ministers and high-level representatives of States Parties issued an urgent call for action on the Treaty’s entry into force. The determination of the international community to achieve progress on the Treaty was also demonstrated at the High Level Meeting on Nuclear Disarmament and Non-Proliferation convened by the Secretary-General.

With the aim of complementing the on-going efforts to advance the entry into force of the Treaty, a group of eminent persons (GEM) was established by the Executive Secretary that includes former Under-Secretaries General, former Secretaries of Defence, current and former Foreign Ministers, and distinguished Ambassadors, parliamentarians, and senior advisors on non-proliferation and international security. The group will leverage the wealth of international experience of its members to promote the Treaty in the remaining Annex 2 States.

Mr Chairman,

It is my hope that as we look to the future, the international community will be inspired to build upon the political momentum created in favour of the CTBT. We have before us a window of opportunity to finally outlaw explosive nuclear testing once and for all.

Yet just as the window has opened, it may also easily swing shut. Those that support the Treaty and its objectives must remain resolute in their determination to achieve progress on the Treaty. States have invested heavily in this Treaty and its verification regime, and adequate steps must be taken to protect this investment so that it continues to pay dividends now and for the future generations.

Thank You.