Republic of Palau

Panel IV: Exchange of Views

Statement to the Open-ended Working Group on Nuclear Disarmament

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Panel IV on essential elements that could form part of effective legal measures, legal provisions and norms that will need to be concluded to attain and maintain a world without nuclear weapons

Thank you Mr. Chairman for the chance to address the floor.

I would like to make some further comments on recognition of the rights of nuclear victims and survivors, which have been raised by number of states and delegations. Palau supports the Humanitarian Pledge, which acknowledges “the unacceptable harm that victims of nuclear weapon testings and explosions have experienced” and the fact that “the rights and needs of victims and survivors have not yet been adequately addressed”.

As I noted in my remarks last week, with reference to working paper submitted by Palau together with Samoa, Nauru, Fiji and Tuvalu that there is currently no international legal instrument that addresses and support the victims and survivors of nuclear weapons. There are no such provisions in the CTBT or anywhere else. Recognizing and addressing the rights of the many nuclear victims and survivors worldwide is a big part of the “legal gap” that needs to be addressed. Additionally, there is no other specific international obligations regarding decontamination or other remediation of areas affected by nuclear
testings and explosions. The victims and survivors of nuclear weapon productions, testings and explosions around the world are in the millions.

I welcome the recognition by Mines Action Canada that Pacific States and people have disproportionately been placed in harm’s way by nuclear tests and explosions for the past half century. Indigenous lifestyle, traditional food source and economic prosperity in these Nations continue to be affected due to the continued presence of radiation exposure.

We have a number of precedents and resources to draw upon. The two most recent treaties banning indiscriminate and inhumane weapons, the Convention on Cluster Munition and the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, as they contain groundbreaking provisions supporting and addressing Victim’s Assistance, including those persons directly impacted by the indiscriminating weapons as well as their affected families and communities. Under both the Landmines and Cluster Munitions Treaties, Victim’s Assistance includes but not limited to emergency care, ongoing medical care, physical rehabilitation, psychological and social support as well as economic integration.

In every place where nuclear test programs have been conducted a legacy of radioactive and other toxic waste will persist for hundreds of thousands of years in our lands, living resources, groundwater and the marine ecosystems.

Test site clean-up and remediation efforts have been feeble and few; thus protecting the people and our biosphere requires long-term commitment and monitoring of all nuclear test sites and clean-up where this is feasible.

Continuing nuclear production and usage affects climate disruption leading to more extreme climate events, including wildfires, storms, floods, landslides and typhoons are expected more frequently in the Pacific region. Advancing sea-level rise will inundate former test sites and waste repositories, particularly in low-lying atolls of the Marshall Islands. This will make leakage more likely; monitoring and any remediation efforts will be more difficult and costly. These
factors add urgency to the need to address and remediate areas of test and explosion sites.

The human suffering caused by nuclear productions, testings and explosions worldwide demands justice for the victims and survivors. We can no longer allow nuclear weapons continue to claim more human life.