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Republic of the Marshall Islands to the United Nations
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Mr. President, Mr. Secretary-General, Excellencies,

For far too many years, these circular negotiations on nuclear non-proliferation under the NPT have failed to listen closely to those voices who know better. There are several nations and peoples in the world who have experienced nuclear weapons directly — and the Marshall Islands stands among them in close solidarity.

In 1954, during our status as a UN Strategic Trust Territory, Marshallese leaders petitioned the United Nations to halt the testing of nuclear weapons. For a moment, we captured headlines around the world. Our voices helped to spur many of the earliest disarmament movements.

But instead of listening to the pleas for help by the Marshallese people, who at the time had been displaced from their home atolls and deprived of a number of human rights, the United Nations responded with two Trusteeship resolutions that further reaffirmed nuclear weapon experiments considered necessary in the interests of world peace and security. The two Trusteeship resolutions 1082 and 1493, adopted in 1954 and 1956, remain the only time in which the UN has ever explicitly authorized the detonation of nuclear weapons. Between 1946 and 1958, 67 nuclear weapons were detonated in the Marshall Islands, by the United States acting as Administering Authority. The exposure of our people and land has created impacts that have lasted – and will last – for generations. All key information on weapons impacts and waste material taken to or left on our shores must be disclosed. These impacts to our human rights, land, culture, health and lives, are burdens that no other nation or country should ever have to bear.

Our own experience, history, and current challenges to nuclear exposure are key drivers for urging progress in reducing - and ultimately eliminating - nuclear risk. We welcome effective and meaningful progress on this from major powers and nuclear weapons states, and from all states - in whatever form it can effectively be achieved.

In 2010, NPT Parties agreed upon a collective deep concern at the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons. This should and must continue to be a guiding beacon for the NPT.

The NPT remains the bedrock of global nuclear disarmament, with wide participation. The test for this meeting to produce a strong outcome and unified message to the world that the reduction- and elimination- of nuclear risk is at hand and on track. This meeting is also a test of multilateralism itself.

No one in this hall should be naive about the difficult state of play of global politics. Yet following the darkest moments of the Cold War, global superpowers were able to start to take steps to address nuclear risk. If we as a world could see past our differences then, we also have the ability to do so today. The Marshall Islands remains gravely concerned about the growing risk of proliferation globally, and in particular regarding nuclear test threats in North Korea.

The NPT remains largely a hollow shell, and alongside it, global nuclear risk is rising - not decreasing. Only eight months later, we are uncertain today if all signatories still stand by their clear commitments in the “Joint Statement of the Leaders of the Five Nuclear-Weapon States on Preventing Nuclear War and Avoiding Arms Races” made in January 2022. We would like to hope that this statement remains valid - as it spoke to important commitments. But it remains - just as it does with NPT’s Article VI - a challenge to see how these promises turn into clear, timebound results.

The legacy of these tests remains a very contemporary threat - in our waters, our lands and our bodies. We have recently formed a National Nuclear Commission to coordinate effective responses, and we continue to view these impacts through a human rights lens.

Despite our commitment, we simply lack the capacity to fully address our local needs. We tirelessly underscore that no people or nation should ever have to bear a burden such as ours, and that no effort should be spared, to move towards a world free of nuclear weapons and nuclear risk, through any and all effective pathways.

We cannot achieve what we do not know. The Marshall Islands is pleased to join the Joint Statement on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Education

It is important that the international community take steps that result in time bound and concrete outcomes aimed towards eliminating nuclear danger. We urge achievement of a world free of nuclear weapons, accompanied by peace and security, and call for a global collective goal towards achievements far stronger than symbolic momentum.