

4 September 2003

Address by Secretary-General F.A.M. Majoor on behalf of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands at the Article XIV conference in Vienna, 3 to 5 September 2003.

Mr President,

I am speaking to you today on behalf of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, who is on his way back at the moment, together with the Dutch Prime Minister, from an official visit overseas.

The end of the Cold War, in the late eighties and early nineties, ushered in a new era of optimism, a feeling that a safer and more stable world was at long last just around the corner. While the threat of a nuclear war indeed has receded since then, the world now faces new dangers and new challenges, sometimes of an entirely different nature. The proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction poses an increasing threat to us all. International terrorism, never entirely absent in the past, now seems to aim at the very foundations of the international community.

Over the last decade and a half, enormous progress has been made towards eliminating some of the most destructive weapon systems created in the twentieth century. In particular, the two major nuclear powers have reduced their nuclear arsenals substantially. In 1995 the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty was extended indefinitely. This decision was widely held to be a major step towards a safer world. The Non-Proliferation Treaty remains the cornerstone of our efforts to curb the further spread of nuclear weapons. At the same time it is a vital element in a strong, and hopefully resilient, structure of each other mutually reinforcing treaties, arrangements and regimes. This web of interlocking international legal instruments forms a powerful barrier against the spread of weapons of mass destruction. As such, it merits our constant vigilance and care.

Mr President,

The Netherlands believes that the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty is an integral part of that structure. Its entry into force will considerably strengthen the non-proliferation regime, both nuclear and non-nuclear.

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty are two sides of the same coin. Above all, they complement and reinforce each other. When the NPT was extended indefinitely in the spring of 1995, it was also agreed, with the full endorsement of the five declared Nuclear Weapon States, that a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty would follow the next year. As you know, Mr President, that commitment was fulfilled. We must

now carry that commitment to its logical conclusion and ensure that the Treaty enters into force within the foreseeable future.

The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty also helps in a more practical way to prevent the further spread of nuclear weapons. A report was recently compiled by a panel of scientists, government officials and experts, including former nuclear weapons designers. It was published by the US National Academy of Sciences and entitled "Technical Issues related to the CTBT". The panel concluded that the Treaty imposes limitations on the nuclear-weapon capabilities that others can achieve, and eliminates the inducement to states to react to testing by others with testing and/or deployments of their own. In a more direct technical sense, a ban on explosive nuclear testing would create an effective obstacle to would-be proliferators who wish to go beyond the capability to manufacture a crude nuclear device.

In the same report the panel expresses its full confidence in the potential of the International Monitoring System now under development here in Vienna. The Netherlands wishes to commend the Executive Secretary, Ambassador Hoffmann, and his dedicated and professional staff in the Provisional Technical Secretariat for their work to date. We shall continue to support the PTS and the Preparatory Commission by continuing to make available the expertise of Ambassador Meerburg and Dr Haak, who took part in the negotiations in Geneva.

Mr President,

The Netherlands is pleased to see that the number of States Signatories and the number of Ratifying States are steadily rising. A special word of welcome goes to Algeria, as the thirty-second Ratifying State of those forty-four states that must ratify the Treaty before it can take effect. We call upon all the States that have not yet done so to sign and/or ratify the Treaty as a matter of urgency. We make a particular appeal to the twelve states whose ratification is still outstanding before the Treaty can enter into force.

As you will all be aware, the Netherlands chaired the negotiations in Geneva in 1996, which led to the conclusion of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. We therefore feel committed to its future. We are prepared, if the Ratifying States so wish, to offer our good offices in a concrete manner to help speeding up the ratification process. We would, of course, work closely with you, Mr President, as coordinator. We propose discussing this in more detail during this Conference.

In conclusion, Mr President, I would like to quote from an article in the New York Times in 1999 by President Chirac of France, Prime Minister Blair of the United Kingdom and Chancellor Schroeder of Germany:

"Failure to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty will be a failure in our struggle against proliferation. The stabilising effect of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, extended in 1995, would be undermined. Disarmament would suffer."

The Netherlands believes this is even more true now than it was four years ago.

Thank you, Mr President.