



Opening Remarks at the West and Central African Regional Conference on the TPNW Universalisation and Implementation

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Mr. President, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

“This Conference should call on the powers of the world to disarm. They must disarm to ensure that they are unable to strike against each other... if you want peace, stop preparing for war,”

Those are not my words. Those are actually the enduring words of Osagyefo Dr Kwame Nkrumah at the very first summit of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961. Six decades later, his words still resonate. Nuclear weapons have not been abolished, and nuclear annihilation remains a global threat. I am therefore particularly grateful to the organizers of today’s event and to our Ghanaian hosts for convening this timely gathering here in Ghana, a reminder of the proud legacy of African leadership for global peace.

Some may ask: given that no African state possesses nuclear weapons, what is Africa’s business with the topic? There are two clear responses to this. Firstly, indeed no African state possesses these weapons. On the contrary, the continent has collectively renounced them through its landmark African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty, known as the Pelindaba Treaty. African states have turned their back on nuclear armament even when some argued it was the currency of power. This provides Africa with a strong moral authority and thereby the obligation to play a leading role in multilateral nuclear disarmament.

Secondly and beyond morality, the elimination of nuclear weapons is a strategic security imperative for Africa. Africa’s collective security is predicated on the understanding that security comes not from amassing weapons of mass destruction, but from eliminating them. Yet, while African states may not possess nuclear arsenals, they are not insulated from the nuclear threat.

Africa has already witnessed and felt the effects of nuclear detonation: between 1960 and 1966, nuclear tests conducted in the Sahara spread radioactive dust on African soil, causing serious and lasting harms to nearby populations and to the environment.

The use of nuclear weapons anywhere on the globe would result in economic, climatic and social disruption, drive mass displacement, and human suffering that knows no borders. In short, *nuclear war endangers people everywhere*. The TPNW reinforces the norm that nuclear weapons are not just immoral but also that their possession and use must be prohibited for all States. Work to

universalize the TPNW therefore fulfils the original promise of both the United Nations and the African Union.

Excellencies, this regional conference is not merely a talk shop, nor is it a platform to simply lament the risks of nuclear weapons. Under Article 12 of the TPNW, States Parties must “encourage States not party to this Treaty to sign, ratify, accept, approve or accede to the Treaty, with the goal of universal adherence of all States to the Treaty”.

At the First Meeting of States Parties, in 2023, an informal working group was established to take forward intersessional work related to universalization of the TPNW.

You are here to share experiences, to assist one another in fulfilling your obligations under the TPNW and to nuclear disarmament in general, and to encourage those states not yet on board to join this historic endeavour. Our task is to ensure robust implementation: translating the treaty’s provisions into practical steps for education, victim assistance, environmental remediation, and continued pressure on States that possess nuclear weapons to change course. Our purpose is to uphold the principle that no nation’s security is served by nuclear weapons, and to broaden the understanding that all our nations are endangered by them.

Let us therefore engage constructively with those who have not yet joined, extending an open hand of dialogue and cooperation. Let us be inspired by the legacy of African visionaries like Kwame Nkrumah, who dared to imagine a world without the Bomb. Let us be inspired by the resilience and unity of this continent, which has played a critical role in helping turn a once-symbolic dream of abolition into a concrete international treaty. And let us be inspired by our duty to future generations, who deserve to inherit a world where security is rooted in justice and common humanity, not in threats of mutual destruction.

As my conclusion, let me borrow the words of another great personality, “*nuclear weapons deliver no security — only the promise of annihilation.*” UN Secretary-General António Guterres.

Thank you for your attention.