



**United Nations Office
for Disarmament Affairs**

**Opening remarks at the International Meeting on Victim Assistance and
Environmental Remediation**

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Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Colleagues and dear friends,

It is a pleasure to join you today on behalf of the Secretary-General and to welcome you to this International Meeting on Victim Assistance and Environmental Remediation. The Secretary-General, who is traveling at the moment, sends his warm greetings to all participants and his best wishes for a productive and substantive meeting.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the Governments of Kazakhstan and Kiribati for their leadership in bringing us together for this important discussion. I would also like to thank all participants for being with us today, especially those representatives of affected communities, the victims of the poisonous legacy of nuclear use and testing. And I welcome the members of international organizations, civil society, academia and the scientific community. I look forward to hearing your expert views.

The General Assembly has provided us with a clear purpose for today's meeting – to exchange experiences and views, advance international cooperation and identify practical ways to support people and communities affected by the use and testing of nuclear weapons.

The consequences of nuclear weapons do not end when an explosion is over. As the enduring suffering of the Hibakusha – the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki – and the legacy of more than 2000 nuclear tests around the world make clear, the effects of nuclear weapons persist for decades and across generations.

These consequences affect human health and well-being. They disrupt livelihoods, communities and traditional ways of life. They leave lasting impacts on land, water and the broader environment.

Addressing these consequences cannot be achieved through short-term measures. It requires sustained national efforts, appropriate expertise and resources, and effective international cooperation.

Allow me to highlight a few practical considerations as we begin our discussions today.

First, affected people and communities must remain at the center of our efforts. Their experiences are essential to understanding both the nature of the harm they have suffered and the assistance that can make a meaningful difference in their lives.

This means listening to affected communities and ensuring their meaningful participation in decisions that concern them. Their knowledge and experience can help identify priorities, improve the design of assistance and ensure that measures taken respond to actual needs and circumstances.

Victim assistance can take different forms depending on national circumstances and the needs of those affected. It may include access to appropriate health care, long-term health monitoring, psychosocial support, as well as measures addressing social and economic consequences.

No single model will apply everywhere. What matters is that assistance is accessible, responsive to identified needs and sustained over time.

Second, environmental remediation also requires a long-term approach. States and communities affected by nuclear weapons use and testing need reliable information about environmental impacts and access to the scientific and technical expertise necessary to determine appropriate responses.

This may involve assessing affected areas, monitoring environmental conditions and identifying measures that can reduce risks and support the safe and sustainable use of land and natural resources.

Here, international cooperation has a particularly important role to play. Not every affected State has access to all the technical capacities or resources it may require. Sharing scientific knowledge, expertise and lessons learned can strengthen national efforts and help ensure that existing experience is put to wider use.

Third, we should make better use of the considerable experience and capacities that already exist.

Governments, affected communities, international organizations, scientific institutions, academia and civil society have accumulated important knowledge throughout the nuclear age.

Some States have developed extensive experience in providing health and social support to affected populations. Others have undertaken environmental monitoring and remediation activities. International and regional organizations possess expertise that can contribute to these efforts, while affected communities themselves hold knowledge that cannot be obtained from scientific or technical assessments alone.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) has also provided an important framework through its articles on victim assistance, environmental remediation and international cooperation and assistance. States Parties and relevant stakeholders continue to develop practical approaches to their implementation.

A key challenge before us now is how to bring these different forms of knowledge and capacity together.

International cooperation can help strengthen national capacities through training, technical assistance, information-sharing and institutional partnerships. Where resources are limited, financial assistance can also be important in enabling affected States and communities to undertake and sustain necessary activities and initiatives.

Fourth, and finally, our efforts must be sustainable.

The impacts we are discussing today are often measured in decades, not years. Responses therefore cannot depend solely on individual projects or temporary initiatives.

Continuity matters. National institutions need the capacity to preserve knowledge and experience. Scientific and health information may need to be maintained over long periods. At the multilateral level, sustained cooperation and institutional engagement are equally important to ensure that expertise, assistance and lessons learned remain available over time. Communities need confidence that support will not disappear when a particular project or funding cycle comes to an end.

International cooperation should support this longer-term perspective.

This meeting provides a valuable opportunity to examine these questions together.

I therefore encourage all participants to focus on concrete experience throughout today's discussions.

What approaches have worked? What challenges continue to prevent effective assistance? Where are the most significant gaps in national capacity? What forms of international cooperation have proved useful? And where could better coordination, stronger partnerships or additional resources make a tangible difference?

I also encourage us to listen carefully to the voices of affected communities represented here today. Their participation is not only important in principle. It is essential to understand where existing approaches are succeeding, where they are falling short, and what priorities should guide future efforts.

We are not starting from zero. There is significant experience to draw upon, knowledge to share and expertise that can be mobilized. There is also growing international recognition that addressing the humanitarian and environmental consequences of nuclear weapons requires sustained attention and practical cooperation.

I hope that this meeting will help identify areas where international efforts can translate, above all, into tangible support for affected people and communities and into effective environmental remediation.

I wish you a productive and constructive meeting.

I thank you very much for your attention.