



## First Meeting of Parties to the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty 15 December 2020

### Statement by Amanda Gorely, Ambassador for Arms Control and Counter Proliferation

I'd like to thank Dame Meg Taylor for chairing this inaugural meeting of Parties to the Treaty of Rarotonga, the first in the 35 years of the Treaty. It is my great pleasure to attend. Foreign Minister Payne would have loved to have participated and sends her apologies given pre-existing commitments which could not be rescheduled. I'd also like to thank the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) Secretariat for its coordination of this important inaugural meeting of Parties to the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone and for its ongoing efforts as the depository and Focal Point for the Treaty.

The South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone, otherwise known as the Treaty of Rarotonga, has a special place in the history of arms control. It is an arrangement designed by countries of the Pacific for the Pacific.

In 1985, when the Treaty opened for signature, there were more than 60,000 nuclear warheads on the planet. Our region had been scarred by hundreds of nuclear tests in the development of these weapons and the risk of nuclear conflict was ever present.

Against this backdrop, we worked in partnership to take decisive steps toward safeguarding the region from the growing impacts of the arms race.

The Rarotonga Treaty, now approaching 35 year of service, was only the second Nuclear Weapon Free Zone to enter into force in a populated region – following the Latin American Zone.

The Treaty has served the interests of the region well, providing assurances to those both within and outside the zone of our collective commitment to nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament.

The important role played by the Treaty is routinely discussed at meetings of the Pacific Islands Forum and also global arms control dialogues, including those dedicated to nuclear weapon free zones.

The Treaty has been a positive force and motivation to other regions to establish their own nuclear weapon free zones, including the Bangkok Treaty in neighbouring South East Asia.

Today, 115 states are parties and signatories to nuclear weapon-free zone treaties, representing almost 60 percent of the United Nations' membership.

Australia is a strong supporter of nuclear weapon free zones. These zones play an important role in strengthening non-proliferation and disarmament. And in enhancing global and regional peace and security.

In this 50th anniversary year of the cornerstone Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty – the NPT – it is fitting that we acknowledge the strong linkage between this treaty and the Rarotonga Treaty.

The Rarotonga Treaty recognizes, in its preamble, the importance of the NPT. It refers to Article VII of the NPT which recognizes the right of any group of States to conclude regional treaties in order to assure the total absence of nuclear weapons in their respective territories.

In the operational provisions of the Treaty, States Parties undertake to support the continued effectiveness of the international non-proliferation system based on the NPT and the IAEA safeguards system.

For Australia, the Rarotonga Treaty reinforces the legally-binding commitments that we have made under the near universal NPT not to manufacture or possess nuclear weapons.

The Rarotonga Treaty further provides a regional reinforcement of global commitments made by Australia on nuclear testing under the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty – the CTBT.

As you will be aware, Australia is running a candidate for the position of Executive Secretary of the CTBT – Dr Robert Floyd. With elections happening later today in Vienna, I would like to thank all our Pacific friends for their support for Dr Floyd. We are hopeful that Dr Floyd will be selected as the first Head of the CTBTO from the Indo-Pacific region.

The vital importance of the CTBT has only increased since its opening for signature. Consistent with the PIF Leaders Communique of last year, we urge all States that have not yet done so to sign and ratify the Treaty. We appeal to all Rarotonga Treaty States Parties to make their utmost efforts toward promoting entry into force of the CTBT, bringing a definitive end to nuclear testing.

The landscape faced by our predecessors drafting the Treaty of Rarotonga in the 1980s has changed in many respects. Nuclear testing in the Pacific has thankfully been relegated to history, but its legacy remains. Global nuclear weapon stockpiles have fallen from over 60,000 to fewer than 14,000. But, the global strategic environment is more challenging and complex. Complacency is not an option. That is why the Treaty of Rarotonga remains as relevant today as ever.