

**Samoa's Statement on Agenda 3:
"35 years of the Rarotonga Treaty – key developments, issues and opportunities"
Virtual Meeting of States Parties to the Rarotonga Treaty
15 December 2020**

Madam Chair,
Honourable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The physical and emotional scars of fear and mistrust as a consequence of the nuclear testing programmes carried out uninvited in some Pacific island countries, gave our region a shared point-of-reference that has shaped our perspective on nuclear disarmament. This experience will not go away with the passing of time. It is etched in our people's memories and will live on forever.

This has made the Pacific region a strong advocate for disarmament, and the Rarotonga Treaty is a tangible testament to that. Our treaty embodies the strong interest which we share in the reduction and eventual elimination of nuclear weapons, and in keeping the Blue Pacific continent free of environmental pollution. The Treaty's Preamble best captures this aspiration by reaffirming the Parties determination to ensure, "*that the bounty and beauty of the land and sea in their region should remain in the heritage of their peoples and descendants in perpetuity, to be enjoyed by all in peace*"

As we mark the 35th anniversary of the Rarotonga Treaty, no complaints have been made under the Treaty and no nuclear testing has taken place in the region for almost 25 years. Notwithstanding this, we share States Parties' concerns about the potential human, environmental and economic risks posed by the shipment of radioactive materials around the world, particularly those shipments that pass through our Blue Pacific waters. We therefore support the call to nuclear shipping States to continue to engage in meaningful dialogue with States Parties on key issues of prevention, response, liability and compensation. Already seriously affected by the impacts of COVID-19, the fragile economies of our countries, which depend heavily on industries such as fisheries and tourism, can be further devastated by negative publicity following an incident in our waters, whether or not that incident resulted in a radioactive release. Where there is a demonstrable link between an incident and economic loss, States Parties should not be left to carry such a loss unsupported.

Regional treaties like the Rarotonga Treaty play an important role in encouraging regional peace and stability, promoting global disarmament and non-proliferation efforts, and reinforcing aspects of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). I recall one of the most significant outcomes of the Second Conference of Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones held in May 2010 in New York was its recognition of the role that Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones play in promoting nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation in today's world. While all five¹ Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones may be different, these very differences can be valuable for their respective members to share best practices and experiences. We are pleased therefore that

¹ Latin America and the Caribbean ([Treaty of Tlatelolco](#), 1967); South Pacific ([Treaty of Rarotonga](#), 1985); Southeast Asia ([Treaty of Bangkok](#), 1995); Africa ([Treaty of Pelindaba](#), 1996); and Central Asia ([Treaty of Central Asia](#), 2006); and the territory of Mongolia (recognised through [resolution 55/335 S](#) of the 2000 UNGA).

representatives of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Nuclear Arms in Latin America (OPANAL) and the African Commission on Nuclear Energy (AFCONE) are able to join us today.

Sharing our unique experiences is one way to help ‘operationalise’ the commitments of our respective Treaties. Our Meeting today provides a critical opportunity to enhance coordination and cooperation among Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones in support of our joint ultimate goal of eliminating all nuclear weapons, as reflected in the 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

The Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty is the first legally binding international agreement to comprehensively prohibit nuclear weapons and will enter into force on 22 January 2021. Samoa signed this Treaty on 20 September 2017 and ratified it a year later on 26 September 2018, underscoring our firm belief that the only guarantee humankind has against the use, and the threat of use of nuclear weapons is through the total elimination of nuclear weapons.

Of noteworthy is the fact that 9 of the 13 States Parties to the Rarotonga Treaty had ratified the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons thus helping to facilitate its expeditious operationalization.

We all want a future with peaceful societies, free from conflict and nuclear weapons. Samoa believes in the importance of multilateralism for countries to grow together, in peace and stability. While there have been notable achievements in regional and global efforts to ensure peace and security, much work still needs to be done. Through our membership to disarmament and non-proliferation conventions, Samoa will continue to urge for a world without weapons of mass destruction, including the total elimination of nuclear weapons. As we have done in other fora, we encourage all nuclear-weapons States to sign and ratify the CTBT as a matter of urgency, and support practical measures to end the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons.

We also encourage Forum Members that are not yet Party to the Rarotonga Treaty to join the Treaty, and hope that in time, we can welcome them as Parties. We can only advance our goals if we stand together, and together, we have great potential in support of our shared vision of a region and a world free from conflict and nuclear weapons.

Let me close by placing on record Samoa’s gratitude to the support and assistance provided by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat to the States Parties in its role as the depositary and focal point for the Treaty since its adoption by Forum Leaders in August 1985.

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