

Statement to the UN commemoration of the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons

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Lakwe and hello. As a Marshallese working to educate people around the world about the damages caused by U.S. nuclear weapons testing in our islands, I celebrate the establishment of September 26 as the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons. Civil society organizations are actively promoting the International Day in a number of ways, including:

- Holding screenings around the world, including at the UN in Geneva, of the movie 'The Man Who Saved the World';
- A joint statement of religious leaders, parliamentarians and mayors for a nuclear-weapon-free world, which was launched in Hiroshima on August 6;
- A global campaign calling on Heads of State and Foreign Ministers to elevate the importance of nuclear abolition including in their statements to the UN General Assembly;
- Social media actions; and
- Concerts, exhibitions, seminars and other public events to highlight the day.

The International Day occurs just as the UN General Assembly begins to consider international security and disarmament issues in the First Committee. It is vital that governments use this opportunity to turn words and paper commitments into action.

The Marshall Islands government is already leading the way. In April 2014, the RMI launched its Nuclear Zero lawsuits against nuclear armed states. The RMI's courageous action is supported by a consortium of more than 90 civil society organizations, including the Marshallese Educational Initiative. You can go to the website NuclearZero.org to track progress of the cases through the courts and lend your support. Remember that disarmament depends on collective action by people of the world, using all available peaceful means.

Now is the time for other governments to step up to the plate and initiate negotiations to fill the legal gap for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons. This would represent a crucial step forward. These negotiations should be open to all—including to civil society—and block-able by none.

One avenue for this would be the establishment of an Open Ended Working Group, with a clear mandate for negotiation, to establish a legal instrument or instruments for a nuclear weapons free world. States at the General Assembly decided to host a high-level conference no later than 2018 to review progress made on nuclear disarmament, which would be an excellent time to open a new instrument or instruments for signature and review actions by all states furthering disarmament.

The people of the Marshall Islands know what it truly means to live in a world with nuclear weapons. In our families and our communities, we continue to grapple with the pain and despair wrought by nuclear weapons. It is because of this knowledge that we refuse to give up hope for a nuclear weapons free world. Kommol tata.