

Keynote Address
Closing Session CTBTO SnT2017
Des Browne, Lord Browne of Ladyton, Vice Chairman, Nuclear Threat Initiative
and former UK Secretary of Defence

Hofburg Palace, Vienna
30 June 2017

Check against delivery

Intro and Thanks

Your Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, and, in particular, members of the CTBT Youth Group.

Thank you very much for your kind introduction.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today. It is always a pleasure for me to be back in Vienna and I am honoured to be asked to provide the closing keynote address for what I know has been an important and productive conference.

And to be back among friends. I am pleased to see so many people in this room whom I have come to know and many of whom I have worked with on issues which are very dear to me. I am always happy to join my friend, Lassina Zerbo – a true visionary and creative thinker, and a tremendous colleague. I know we are all grateful for your leadership, Lassina.

Words about the conference

The solutions to many of the world's major problems rely upon a combination of policy change and scientific or technical innovation. A significant challenge is to ensure that as scientific innovation advances it does so, at least in part, by addressing the policy issues at every step; an innovation with no prospect of making a real impact will simply remain a nice piece of science. Conversely, a policy introduced in the absence of scientific and technical substantiation will at best flounder. By bringing these two disciplines together real and positive change can be achieved..

Governments worldwide rely on scientific advice on issues such as the impact of climate change, the consequences of an ageing population, water security, sustainability, and cybersecurity. In the UK there are 11 Chief Scientific Advisers embedded within Government departments, in the USA there is a Government

sponsored group of independent elite scientists, the so-called JASON, that meet for an intensive period annually to report on specific science/policy issues. In Singapore scientists and technologists occupy senior Government posts ensuring that public impact of science is a fundamental driver to policy.

The value of bringing together these key areas cannot be underestimated. During my time serving in cabinet positions I frequently found myself depending on the advice of government experts for issues of a technical and scientific nature. Looking back, however, I am concerned increasingly about the reliability of this advice and, more broadly, the lack of infrastructure for developing sound policies based on truly independent and reliable evidence. I am convinced that government policies will be much sounder if government has the benefit of reliable, independent, expert advice to answer key policy questions and review evidence.

Nowhere is this truer than the Arms Control world. Thankfully, the CTBTO has built a reputation for providing that reliability, independence and expert advice.

In particular, CTBTO's Science and Technology Conferences provide an opportunity for the world's scientists to exchange knowledge, including knowledge about advances in monitoring and verification technologies. Ensuring that the Treaty's unique global verification regime remains at the forefront of scientific and technical innovation.

Since their inception, the SnT Conferences have evolved. In the early days, it was purely a scientific and technological conferences among scientists. In 2015, it was expanded to include academia and policy/diplomacy elements. And this year, - the sixth in a series of multidisciplinary conferences designed to "further enhance the strong relationship between the scientific and technological community and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban-Treaty Organization (CTBTO) as well as with policy-makers." – a new fifth theme involving civil society, entitled "Monitoring for Nuclear Explosions in a Global Context" and including Capacity building, Education and Public Awareness, has been added to the traditional four scientific themes.

Also, SnT17 has had a special focus on youth and young scientists. It is the first major CTBTO event to include CTBTO Youth Group members. On the one hand, their inclusion provides the CYG members with a unique opportunity to deepen their knowledge of the CTBT verification technologies and, on the other, provides the CTBTO with the opportunity to introduce the Group to the wider community, promoting a fuller understanding of the Youth Group initiative and its objectives.

I was particularly pleased to be here in 2016 at the inauguration of the CTBT Youth Group. As I said then "I have invested a significant amount of hope and optimism in the younger generation that they will be able to undo some of the difficulties that we have created for you. You are going to inherit a very complicated and difficult world".

The achievement of the CTBTO

As I have said many times before, the CTBTO is an extraordinary organization – and that is due in large part to its extraordinarily capable staff.

There should be no question that what has been accomplished to date is extraordinary. You have demonstrated to the world that it is indeed possible to build a robust and reliable global monitoring and verification surveillance system – and one that has life-saving applications that go beyond its original intent.

Thanks to your good work:

- a verification regime to monitor the globe for nuclear explosions is nearing completion with around 90% of the 337 planned International Monitoring System (IMS) facilities already in operation;
- the system has proved its capabilities to detect even small nuclear tests;
- in addition to nuclear test monitoring, scientists use CTBTO data in a wide range of applications, from observing volcanoes and icebergs, to studying marine mammals and improving disaster mitigation strategies, and much more;
- the CTBT is the most broadly supported arms control treaties with 183 signatories and 164 ratifications and
- the world now has a de facto moratorium on testing, North Korea notwithstanding.

You have every reason to be proud – and I am proud to be here and to be associated with this very fine organization.

There is a lot to be proud of – and as I say repeatedly the scientists and technical experts responsible for so much of this success must be recognized for all they have achieved and can achieve, but they must also accept their responsibility that they have to do all they can to share the story of the CTBTO's success to help the officials and politicians working to convince the remaining Annex 2 States that it is in their best interests – and the world's best interest – to support the Treaty.

Today's difficult environment

But the Treaty has yet to enter into force.

We are, of course, in a very different place than we were more than 20 years ago, when the Treaty was opened for signature.

Today:

In the recently published words of Daryl Kimball's, of The Arms Control Association:

Nearly five decades ago, the 1968 nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) established the requirement that states-parties pursue "effective measures" to end the nuclear arms race and to achieve nuclear disarmament. The United States and Russia have reduced their Cold War stockpiles and verifiably banned nuclear explosive testing. But some 15,000 weapons remain, additional nuclear-armed states have emerged, and the risk of nuclear weapons use is rising. Key NPT disarmament commitments made in 2010 are unfulfilled. The future of key nuclear arms control treaties, including the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty and the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, are in doubt. The 1996 Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) has not formally entered into force. Global fissile material stocks remain very substantial. Worse still, the world's nine nuclear-armed states are replacing, upgrading, or in some cases expanding their arsenals.

Today:

The relationship between Russia and the West – still crucial in today's world – is at its lowest point in 25 years. Trust and communication between leaders has all-but disappeared, and the threat of conflict escalation has become increasingly real, creating a very dangerous situation in a region and among countries with a high concentration of both conventional and nuclear forces.

The Middle East is in turmoil. The Israeli-Palestinian peace process is moribund. Syria is in chaos. Instability in Iraq is growing. Brutal terrorist attacks by ISIL, al Qaeda, Boko Haram and other organizations are on the rise in the region and beyond, raising the spectre of radiological or catastrophic nuclear terrorism if terrorist groups get control of dangerous materials.

In the United States, even before the presidential race got underway, relations between the two major political parties were so poisonous that it was hard to imagine them coming together on any issue at all – much less one involving national and international security.

And North Korea, as we are all painfully aware, has recently conducted its fourth nuclear test since 2006 – exhibiting continued rejection of global norms and reinforcing its complete disinterest in taking a place in the global community. Its actions are a sobering reminder of continued nuclear dangers from state actors, as well as the ongoing threat of nuclear proliferation.

The consequences of a global erosion of trust and cooperation – as well as escalating dangers – can be devastating. According to a recent survey of leading security experts from the U.S., Russia and Europe recently conducted by my

colleagues at the Nuclear Threat initiative, the deterioration of relations in particular has led to very dangerous conditions under which the use of a nuclear weapon – whether by intent, misuse, miscalculation or accident -- has become higher than at any time since the end of the Cold War. Though still unlikely, the notion that the risk of nuclear use today is rising is – and ought to be – profoundly disturbing.

Usually, when I get to this stage in a speech about the these issues or more particularly about the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and its entry into force, having just described a deteriorating global geo-political environment, I remind my audience of the need to retain a degree of optimism, even in the face of what may appear to be overwhelming odds.

Typically, my argument goes something like this: “We will not always live in this moment and change can happen very quickly”. I then go on to give you examples of change, my recent favourite is that the Ukraine crisis came out of virtually nowhere. Then, I will argue that even if the current circumstances prevail and worsen, it is still possible to make progress on difficult matters, especially disarmament, arms control or non-proliferation issues. As examples, I can draw on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action – the Iran Deal, the removal of chemical weapons and their materials from Syria or the continued success of President Obama’s Nuclear Materials Security initiative.

Finally, I have become adept at winding up my speeches by finding some new way of approaching the challenges we face and arguing for its promotion by members of my audience. So, variously, I have encouraged commitment to an engagement with international verification, joint work on cyber security – in our common interests, moving from persuasive mode to listening mode with recalcitrant nation states who are holding back on signature or ratification of the Treaty or just plain appeal to the self-interest of those countries supported by scientists or those technically able to persuade decision-makers that the international monitoring system is a technical and scientific improvement of proven merits and bound to improve everyone’s security. A favourite is to appeal to those countries who have ratified to make entry into force a diplomatic priority.

I can do that again today, if that is what you want me to do. I can draw on words and ideas that I have deployed here in this great city in many different environments, but for a reason that I shall explain, I would rather not do so. But I ask you to consider those arguments and challenges to have been advanced.

There is something significantly different about this Science and Technology Conference and that is the significant presence of and involvement of CTBT Youth Group in the conference. As I have already reminded you, I was here in February 2016 at the inauguration of the Youth Group and shared my faith in the potential of the optimism of youth with those who were present.

I am delighted that my optimism has been justified by the presence and the contribution of the young people who have been with us over the last week.

Unfortunately, many of us old hands have become inured to the optimism of youth. Over the years, the inevitable maturing process has driven us into the politics of realism. We have fallen prey to the arguments that hope and optimism are naivety. Consequently, we have become adept at describing the problem, rather than working to solve it.

In short, the problem here is that we, as a generation of leaders, have lost the ability to be able to describe the world we want to live in and to show the leadership necessary to get us to that place. But, the youth of this world - younger people who live part of their lives in a virtual borderless environment and who have gotten used to living world with much broader horizons and a significantly greater tolerance of diversity - are beginning to show us the way back to that form of politics and leadership. For some years now, As I travel the world, I have been confused by my own observations that the people who want to live free of the threat of nuclear weapons and their materials, the people who want to live in a world of mutual security rather than deterrence, the people who want to live in a world of hope, rather than despair, of diversity, rather than narrow national interests – those people are in the majority. While, at the same time, they are seldom in leadership.

I have observed this phenomenon in many countries. I lived and worked for the last three years in the U.S. It is present there.

In my own country, the United Kingdom, we have just had a General Election. In that election, younger people have, for the first time in my political life, through social media engagement, become an active and significant force in a General Election. Their votes did not win a majority, but it stopped the expected majority. That is always the first step towards power, denying a majority to your opposition. About a million young people registered to vote for the first time in the lead up to the Election and using their own preferred form of communication, shared the fact that they were a large group, with each other, jointly reinforcing their desire to reject a politics of austerity, for a politics of hope and opportunity.

I have no doubt that the young people who are with us now in this Conference, who are building their capacity to make the case for the hope and opportunity of a world free of nuclear weapons can deploy similar skills in the same space to a similar effect.

And it is our duty to support them wholeheartedly in that endeavour.

Sahil Shah, a member of the Youth Group addressed you earlier this week and he shared his speech with me.

I want to close with Sahil's words, because he makes the case better than I can make it.

"We (the youth) need you to share with us the ways in which we can better understand (how) arguments rooted in science and technology can be socialized to inform our politics. If we do not work together, we will lose the chance to turn scientific and technical expertise into a radical agent for change.....

....Together we must create more meaning full outcomes."

.