

Presentation of the Chairman of the Board of the Foreign Policy
Research Institute under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of
Kazakhstan Bolat Nurgaliyev

(August 19, 2021 online with Singapore)

Minister Choudhury, Ambassadors Rohas and Bahruddin, dear ladies and gentlemen, good morning from sunny Nur-Sultan! I am thankful to the Embassy of Kazakhstan in Singapore and personally to my good friend Ambassador Arken Arystanov for opportunity to present my views on the subject of today's round table. Allow me to express gratitude to all the participants for finding time in their schedule to mark together with us the 30-th anniversary of the closure of the Semipalatinsk nuclear test range.

The decision of the First President of Kazakhstan-Leader of the Nation Nursultan Nazarbayev to close the Semei polygon was greeted by the entire Kazakh population with deep satisfaction. It was a long anticipated decision made possible in the atmosphere of emerging signs of inevitable collapse of the Soviet Union, when the Kremlin could no longer exert pressure on choices of leaders of the component parts of the empire. Within the Kazakh society demands for banning activities at the nuclear test range were growing, especially due to public opinion building efforts of the antinuclear movement, as pointed out by Minister Choudhury, "Nevada-Semipalatinsk" lead by prominent poet and popular politician Oljas Suleimenov.

For our entire nation wounds caused by nuclear tests were deep, both in terms of affecting health of local population and environmental degradation of a vast region encompassing three provinces – Semipalatinsk, Pavlodar and Karaganda, that is a combined territory of several mid-sized countries. Throughout 42 years of the polygon tests 468 nuclear explosions were conducted, including 116 nuclear blasts in the atmosphere and

the rest nuclear blasts underground, with a total yield of up to 400 megatons. Considering that the nuclear bomb which on the 6 of August, 1945 devastated Hiroshima, had a yield of 13 kilotons, the total deadly capacity of nuclear explosions in the Semipalatinsk polygon was equal to thirty thousand Hiroshimas.

There is no exaggeration in pointing out that Nursultan Nazarbayev's decision of August 29, 1991 to close once and forever the Semipalatinsk nuclear polygon rightfully belongs to the category of the most consequential decisions of the last century.

Since then Kazakhstan became a participating state of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. By 1996 the entire territory of the Republic has been rid of nuclear weapons related infrastructure, thus fulfilling our obligations under the Lisbon Protocol, committing Kazakhstan to eliminate all the remnants of the former Soviet nuclear arsenal. Nowadays our country has impeccable reputation in the sphere of non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, fully honoring its pledge to be a responsible member of the family of civilized nations. We are not restricting ourselves by earlier commitments in the sphere of non-proliferation and arms control. More than that, we are quite proactive in promoting new initiatives aimed at making our planet safer. As it was evident from the power point so expertly prepared by the Kazakhstan Embassy. Among the major achievements along this path some deserve special mention.

Kazakhstan, together with its neighbours, created a Nuclear Weapon Free Zone in Central Asia.

In 2009, the UN General Assembly unanimously accepted a resolution put forward by Kazakhstan proclaiming August 29 as the "International Day against Nuclear Tests".

This year Kazakhstan will table at the 76th United Nations General Assembly the regular Resolution on the Universal Declaration for the Achievement of a Nuclear-Weapons-Free World and we call on all to support and sponsor it.

Last year President Kassym-Jomart Tokaev approved a new Concept of Foreign Policy of Kazakhstan for 2020-2030. Among the priorities – mobilizing global support for total and comprehensive ban of nuclear weapons. Because of our bitter experience of exposure to nuclear tests, we believe that we have moral right to call other states to make this choice. Two years ago Kazakhstan ratified the Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty, proceeding from conviction that we should do everything in our power to eliminate the threat of nuclear annihilation of human civilization. By the way, the Treaty entered into force in January 2021, which is symbolically coinciding with the 30-th anniversary of the closure of the Semipalatinsk test range.

Unfortunately, nowadays there is no appropriate level of international solidarity and readiness for constructive interaction in dealing with clear and present challenges and threats to global and regional security. What we witness instead is crisis of trust, worsening of conflicts and contradictions and accepting sanctions and restrictions as normal practice of interstate relations. We witness alarming erosion of basic principles of international law when some powerful states denounce their own obligations and withdraw from earlier signed treaties. Take, for example, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on the Iranian nuclear program, the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty, the Open Skies Treaty, even the START-3, destiny of which was saved at the last moment. Mind that all these documents were at the time of their entry in force considered a major breakthrough in strengthening global strategic stability and international security.

There is no ground to consider that the NPT, ceremoniously signed on July 1, 1968 in London, Moscow and Washington, lived up to the lofty expectations of the international community. 53 years passed and a number of states possessing nuclear weapons nearly doubled – from 5 in 1968, there are at least 9 in 2021. So instead of non-proliferation we witness spread of nuclear weapons. Moreover, nuclear ambitions of some countries push political leaders of their neighbors, ignoring their obligations under the NPT, to seriously consider obtaining a nuclear potential of their own.

Article 6 of the NPT contains commitment of the participants to conduct in the spirit of good will negotiations on effective measures to stop nuclear arms race in the near future and bring about nuclear disarmament. Unfortunately, 53 years later the goal of getting rid of nuclear weapons is as distant as it can be. We should break this vicious circle when nuclear weapons states continue to improve the murderous capacity of their strategic arsenals.

I would like to use this opportunity and call on the participants of the round table to join efforts in pressing nuclear powers to honor their commitment of 1968 and once and for all eliminate nuclear weapons under strict international control. If foreign policy experts unite in solidarity and consistently keep raising this particular issue with decision makers, MPs, public opinion activists, media and NGOs of different countries, it is feasible to bring about the universalization of the Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty as a way to further pressure nuclear powers into doing what is, undoubtably, in the vital interests of the entire global community.

In conclusion, expressing my appreciation for your kind attention, I wish you all good health and every success in your noble activities.