



**United Nations General Assembly
First Committee**

Thematic Debate on Nuclear Weapons

**Delivered by H.E. Dr. Caleb Otto
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Mr. Chair,

Allow me to begin by congratulating you on your election as Chair of First Committee. I assure you of my delegation's full support and cooperation.

Palau, being a nuclear-free-constitution government strongly supports all efforts to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons. Hence, we co-sponsored the resolution led by Japan L.26, titled, "United action with renewed determination towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons". Total elimination of nuclear weapons is a humanitarian imperative of the highest order. It is unacceptable that nuclear weapons remain the only weapons of mass destruction not yet outlawed. They threaten the security of all nations and peoples, and the planet as a whole.

Palau participated actively in this year's UN open-ended working group on nuclear disarmament in Geneva, and voted in favor of its landmark report. As an endorser of the Humanitarian Pledge, we firmly support the recommendation to convene negotiations in 2017 on a treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons. We are proud to be a cosponsor of draft resolution L.41, which takes forward this recommendation. We strongly urge all UN Member States to vote "yes", on this resolution, later this month.

Palau, together with our Pacific Island neighbors Fiji, Nauru, Samoa and Tuvalu, submitted a paper to the UN working group with proposed elements for the treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons, including provisions on victim assistance. We hope that our suggestions will be useful during the negotiating process next year.

Last Thursday, the President of the 71st session of the UN General Assembly, His Excellency Mr. Peter Thomson, reminded First Committee that our region, the Pacific, "still bears the human and environmental scars from nuclear weapons testing".

Over the course of half a century, more than 300 nuclear test explosions occurred in our region. The impact of these tests on our fragile ecology and the physical health, mental and psychosocial wellbeing of our people has been profound.

We continue to experience epidemics of cancers, chronic diseases and congenital abnormalities as a result of the radioactive fallout that blanketed our homes and the vast Pacific Ocean on which we depend for our livelihoods. Entire atolls remain unsafe for habitation, for agricultural production, and for fishing.

Many Pacific islanders have been permanently displaced from their homes and disconnected from their indigenous way of life. They have suffered, and continue to suffer, untold anguish, heartache and pain. We urge you to bear this experience in mind when you decide how to vote on draft resolution L.41.

How can any nation claim that nuclear weapons are legitimate weapons when we know the harm they cause to people and the environment? How can we ignore the pleas of survivors of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

For 71 years, nuclear disarmament has been on the UN agenda. A ban on the most dreadful weapons ever created is long overdue—and is now on its way.

Those of us who support the prohibition of nuclear weapons are not fooling ourselves, as one delegation suggested last week. We understand the challenges in realizing our goal. But, equally, we understand that it would be foolish to believe that these weapons can exist for decades to come, and will never be used again.

Palau looks forward to joining you next March for the first round of negotiations on a treaty banning nuclear weapons. This will be a historic moment. If you are not yet convinced that a ban is needed, I implore you to recall the first-hand testimonies of the people who have suffered given by the Permanent Representative of the Marshall Islands on the occasion of the International Day of Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons, in the Trusteeship Chamber last month and the Petitioners from French Polynesia during the 1st week of this year's session of the Fourth Committee. These, are Pacific islanders, like we are, whose fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters, have experienced from the minute of the first explosion until today the horror that these weapons of mass destruction unleash.

I Thank you for your kind attention.