European Union

Statement on the occasion of the 55th Session of Working Group B

(24 – 26 August 2020)

1. I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States. The following countries align themselves with this statement: Turkey§, The Republic of North Macedonia*, Montenegro*, Iceland+, Serbia*, Albania*, Bosnia and Herzegovina*, Norway+, Ukraine, The Republic of Moldova, Armenia and Georgia.

Mr. Chair,

2. As this is the last WGB session under your chairmanship, I would like to thank you for your dedication and commitment and for your hard work. Your leadership and outstanding ability to forge consensus have ably steered WGB in the past six years. I would also like to recognise the Provisional Technical Secretariat (PTS) for the thorough preparation of this meeting under extraordinary circumstances, in close cooperation with Task leaders, and I hope that the coming session can resume its normal work.

Mr. Chair,

3. The CTBT's entry into force has always been and remains a priority for the European Union. The EU Member States have ratified the Treaty many years ago and have been consistent in calling upon the remaining eight Annex 2 States - China, Egypt, Iran, Israel, and the USA who will need to ratify the Treaty and the DPRK, India and Pakistan who will need to sign and ratify it for it to enter into force – to do so without any preconditions or further delay. It is also crucial that all States fully observe the moratorium on nuclear test explosions and refrain from any actions contrary to the object and purpose of the Treaty.

4.. Let me reiterate that we welcome every opportunity to engage with all states and to demonstrate the added value the organization provides for security and science. With this in mind we trust that the forthcoming fourth CTBT Symposium on Science and Diplomacy will contribute to further strengthening the link between the scientific and policy making communities. In particular, the EU

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§ Candidate Country
*Candidate Countries the Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania, as well as potential Candidate Country Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.
+ Iceland and Norway are members of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.

MS highly value the manifold civil and scientific uses of IMS data and support exploring their full potential. We should also keep in mind the upcoming 2021 NPT RevCon that will be yet another opportunity to promote the Treaty and its entry into force, including all positive outcomes and applications of the verification regime.

Mr. Chair,

5. The European Union wishes to commend the PTS and the efforts of the CTBTO Signatory States, particularly those hosting IMS facilities, for keeping the IMS and IDC working in accordance with the Treaty standards, in spite of the COVID19 restrictions.

6. The European Union considers the completion of the IMS a priority and encourages the PTS and concerned States Signatories to cooperate to this end. With IMS construction ongoing for more than twenty years, it is high time all facilities are established, certified and operating.

7. The European Union continues to firmly believe that the targeted and timely limited use of transportable monitoring systems is a necessity to further the understanding of the background for all four IMS technologies. As stated in several sessions of the Working Group B, noble gas background measurements in particular help study the characterization of global radio-xenon background and support the calibration and the performance assessment of the monitoring system, thus being ultimately functional to the verification regime, as described in the Treaty. While this issue is not on the agenda of the current session of WG B, we look forward to discussing it at the upcoming 55th session of the Preparatory Commission.

8. Many planned scientific activities, capacity-building events and on-site inspection build up exercises have been postponed because of the present pandemic. The upcoming WG-B discussions, here in Vienna and through the ECS Forum, are a major opportunity for us all to analyze the impact of these postponements on the planned activities of the PTS, the States Signatories, and on the best way to reschedule and sometimes reshape these activities for the near future.

Mr. Chair,

9. The European Union has been a staunch supporter of the CTBT through active engagement, diplomatic outreach and not least, through financial support for the CTBTO. In accordance with this continued political and financial commitment to the Organization, the EU continues to provide additional voluntary contributions to support the verification regime as well as capacity building and outreach. The EU's eighth consecutive voluntary contribution was announced on 29 June.

10. Finally, we took note with appreciation that an increasing number of Signatory States have paid their assessed contributions, including some strongly affected by the pandemic. As of 16 August, 69 states [to be updated] were in arrears, compared to 77 last year. We understand that many countries are hard-hit by the current crisis. However, it is crucial for the operation of the verification regime of the Treaty, and

for the organization's financial health, that all Signatory States demonstrate their political commitment and honor their legal obligation to pay assessed contributions, on time and in full.

11. Following this view, the EU and its Member States are looking forward to discussing the updated programme and budget 2021, and to initiate discussion on the 2022-2023 budget, taking into account the impact of the COVID-19 on the activities on the CTBTO. Regarding the preparation of the verification-related elements of the Programme and Budget, we consider it important that a high proportion of resources continue to be dedicated to verification-related activities. We appreciate the PTS's efforts to identify and implement cost-saving and efficiency measures, while ensuring that the budget is guided by the needs of the programme.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.