

AFRICAN UNION

الاتحاد الأفريقي



UNION AFRICAINE

UNIÃO AFRICANA

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, P.O. Box: 3243 Tel.: (251-11) 5513 822 Fax: (251-11) 5519 321

Email: situationroom@africa-union.org

**COMMEMORATION OF THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CLOSURE OF SEMIPALATINSK
NUCLEAR TEST SITE**

6 SEPTEMBER 2016

ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR SMAÏL CHERGUI
COMMISSIONER FOR PEACE AND SECURITY



Your Excellency, Ambassador Yerlik Ali, Representative of Kazakhstan,

Excellencies, Ambassadors and Representatives of AU Member States and international partners,

Distinguished representatives of the media,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to congratulate the government and people of Kazakhstan on the 25th anniversary of the closure of the Semipalatinsk nuclear testing site. On behalf of the African Union, I wish to pay tribute to the government leaders and members of civil society who have worked resolutely to make this a reality.

The African Union is not only honored to host this event but is strongly committed to the broader cause it symbolizes. Africa, like Kazakhstan, has suffered the negative consequences of nuclear-weapons testing. After years of tireless efforts, the African Nuclear Weapon Free Zone Treaty, also known as the Treaty of Pelindaba, was signed in 1996. Through the Treaty, the continent collectively and unequivocally rejected nuclear-weapons.

I am therefore glad that this year, as we join Kazakhstan in celebrating the closure of Semipalatinsk testing site, we also celebrate the 20th anniversary of the signing of the African Nuclear Weapon Free Zone Treaty, and the 10th anniversary of the Central Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone, which was appropriately signed in, and named after, Semipalatinsk. It is our strong belief that nuclear-weapon-free zones remain critical building blocks to realizing a world free of nuclear-weapons.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, as we celebrate triumphantly a significant event, we are reminded that entire communities in different parts of the world continue to grapple with the environmental and health consequences of nuclear testing. Moreover, our world continues to live under the threat of nuclear disaster, either as a result of war, accident, or terrorism.

We must therefore persist in our efforts towards permanent, universal and verifiable nuclear disarmament. This can only be achieved through consistent and multi-pronged efforts that include reviving the international disarmament mechanisms, educating our people, imploring our leaders, and strengthening the legal regimes against nuclear weapons.

In this regard, I would like to reiterate that the African Union remains concerned that a critical international instrument against nuclear testing - the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty - has not yet entered into force. While we commend states that have unilaterally imposed moratoria against nuclear testing, this cannot be a substitute for a universal, legally-

binding, transparent and verifiable regime. Without the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, the risk of return to nuclear testing will be ever present and with catastrophic consequences. I therefore seize this opportunity to call upon all concerned members of the international community to act with the required sense of urgency, responsibility and leadership, in bringing the Treaty into force.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Working towards nuclear disarmament must go hand in hand with enhancing international cooperation in the peaceful application of nuclear science and technology. Countless societies, especially in Africa, are without access to life-saving nuclear medicine and are denied the benefits of other peaceful nuclear applications in the areas of environmental protection, disease control, agriculture and industry. We must therefore ensure that advancing peaceful nuclear applications receives equal attention and resources as do the areas of nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear security.

In concluding, I wish to heartily congratulate Kazakhstan once again as it celebrates the 25th anniversary and for exhibiting a strong sense of commitment and leadership in regional and global nuclear disarmament efforts.

Thank you for your kind attention.