



Statement by

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**at the Opening Session of the 5th Conference of States Parties
to the Pelindaba Treaty
(African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty)**

Thursday, 21 October 2021

Chairperson of the African Commission on Nuclear Energy (AFCONE), Adv Doctor Mashabane

Vice Chairperson of AFCONE, Mr Hadjaro Adam

Commissioners of AFCONE

Executive Secretary of AFCONE, Mr Messaoud Baaliouamer

Executive Secretary of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organisation, Dr Robert Floyd

Excellences and Distinguished participants

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honour and great pleasure to participate in this opening session of the 5th Conference of States Parties to the Pelindaba Treaty. It is my particular honour to welcome you all to South Africa, home of the Treaty establishing a nuclear-weapon-free African continent, the Pelindaba Treaty.

Let me also take this opportunity to welcome the Heads of the various international organisations and United Nations (UN) bodies who have joined us today and thank them for their participation.

Allow me to add that it is a welcome sight for all of us to be able to meet in-person, after such a very long time. While I appreciate that this Conference is being conducted in a hybrid format, I am particularly pleased to observe that we are gradually returning to some level of normalcy, in a socially distanced and responsible manner. The COVID-19 pandemic has indeed significantly changed the way we live our lives and conduct our business.

The Pelindaba Treaty was created with the ambitious aim to enhance regional peace and security through the prohibition of the possession and stationing of nuclear weapons throughout Africa and encourages the peaceful use of nuclear science and technology. In this regard, we would like to express our gratitude to all the African countries that have signed and ratified the Pelindaba Treaty and to urge all those who have not yet done so, to ratify the Treaty without further delay, in order to fully achieve the objective of having a peaceful and prosperous Continent. In a way, the Pelindaba Treaty also underpins the commitment of our leaders to silence the guns.

Chairperson,

South Africa could not have asked for a more opportune time to have this very first Conference of States Parties to the Pelindaba Treaty on South African soil than now. This is because we are commemorating the 30th Anniversary of South Africa's ratification of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) as well as the signature of the Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement (CSA) with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in 1991. We remain convinced that the NPT is the cornerstone of the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime and that the IAEA Safeguards are an indispensable tool for ensuring the non-diversion of nuclear material towards military purposes. It is in this regard that the Pelindaba Treaty and the NPT complement each other.

We must also be cognisant that over five decades following the adoption of the *Declaration on the Denuclearisation of Africa* at the 1964 Summit of the Organisation of

African Unity (OAU), and 12 years after the entry into force of the Pelindaba Treaty, there remain unilateral interpretations or reservations by some Nuclear Weapon States, who are *de facto* in control of territory within the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone, thus negatively affecting the status of the African denuclearized zone.

We, therefore call on these Nuclear Weapon States to withdraw their unilateral reservations unequivocally. These external constraints on the African continent must come to an end. Africa must be able to take charge and maintain complete control of her territories and their nuclear-weapon-free status.

Chairperson,

South Africa has the distinct honour of being the first country to have voluntarily eliminated our nuclear weapons programme and we are equally proud to also have played a leading role in the finalisation of the Pelindaba Treaty, which establishes the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone. Consequently, we strongly support and encourage the establishment of other Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones in areas where they do not exist, particularly the establishment of a Middle East zone free from all weapons of mass destruction and the implementation of the 1995 NPT resolution on the establishment of such a zone.

We are also hopeful that the seventy-sixth session of the UN General Assembly will finally take a decision on the convening of the “Fourth Conference of Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones and Mongolia”, which has been postponed several times.

Chairperson,

Africa’s key objective must be to promote the inalienable right of all State Parties to have access to nuclear energy, science and technology for peaceful purposes with the aim of realising Africa’s Agenda 2063 and, achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We therefore need to continue to guard against attempts to deny technology to countries, especially developing countries, under the guise of non-

proliferation measures, especially measures that fall outside the IAEA verification system.

Another important development to acknowledge is the entry-into-force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) on 22 January 2021, which represents the highest non-proliferation commitment any State can make. This new Treaty is fully consistent with the NPT, especially Article 6 and the Pelindaba Treaty. As we advocate for general and complete disarmament leading to the total elimination of weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons, the TPNW's strong focus on the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of the use of nuclear weapons, helps to shift disarmament from an international security issue to a human security issue.

In this regard we must acknowledge that this was also the objective of the very first UN General Assembly Resolution adopted 75 years ago, in 1946, to ensure "*the elimination from national armaments of atomic weapons and all other major weapons adaptable to mass destruction*".

Chairperson,

This 5th Conference of States Parties to the Pelindaba Treaty gives us an opportunity to continue developing and enhancing the efforts of AFCONE to fully implement the Pelindaba Treaty. I encourage all participants to fully engage in the discussions that will be held over the next two days and to ensure that the important work of AFCONE continues unabated in this vein.

In conclusion, I would like to thank AFCONE and Executive Secretary Baaliouamer for organising this important Conference of States Parties, particularly given the challenging circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is significant that we are able to have this meeting prior to the NPT Review Conference and the First Meeting of States Parties of the TPNW, in order to highlight Africa's commitment to a world free from all weapons of mass destruction.

Indeed, there is no rational reason for possessing nuclear weapons and we must collectively work towards the elimination of all such weapons.

Finally, Chairperson,

I would like to end by expressing South Africa's continued support for, and commitment to, the work of AFCONE, and to wish you all success with your deliberations over the next two days.

I thank you.