

At Vienna forum, young people raise their voices for world free of nuclear weapons

29 June 2017 – Around 100 young people from 54 countries are raising their voices and harnessing social media to help mobilize support for a world free of nuclear weapons, and advance the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT).

Youth are among the 1,000 participants at this week's Science and Technology 2017 Conference, held in Vienna, Austria, which provides a forum for scientists around the world to exchange knowledge and share advances in monitoring and verification technologies of relevance to the CTBT, which prohibits nuclear explosions anywhere in the world.

The meeting, which concludes on Friday, is convened by the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, known as the CTBTO, a UN partner organization.

"Although we are not government leaders or in a position to influence public policy, we have a voice and when we use our voice collectively, we can make a big impact," said Carlos Rodriguez, a student at the University of Dallas in the United States.

"We have to find ways to collaborate across borders to ensure that we live in a peaceful and safe world that future generations can enjoy," he added.

The youth listened to presentations from scientists around the world specializing in technologies for detecting nuclear events and committed to using social media and blogs to encourage others to push for the Treaty's entry into force.

For the CTBT, adopted by the General Assembly in September 1996, to enter into force, ratification is required from the so-called Annex II countries. Of these, China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), Egypt, India, Iran, Israel, Pakistan, and the US have yet to ratify.

"There is a big nuclear threat at the moment. It is important that we know that there is a solution. The CTBT is the first step towards a world free of nuclear weapons, which guarantees peace for all," said Juan Bustamante, a young Ecuadorian who is studying in Vancouver, Canada.

He encouraged other young people to talk with their friends about the Treaty and its importance to raise awareness of the issue and push for the instrument's entry into force.

"Nuclear weapons should be a thing of the past," said 21-year-old Kevin Bai, who was born in China, raised in the US and is currently studying and working in Dubai.

His message is addressed to young people in Asia: "The eyes of the world are set in Asia because it will be the centre of growth and progress. If you are an Asian resident, you should not be satisfied with being a leader in economic development or scientific research. You should demand that it also becomes a leader in peace and diplomacy because stability is the bedrock upon which human civilization is built," he emphasized.

"If you think nuclear warfare and nuclear tests do not belong in our societies and we should get rid of them, then you can contribute to this movement," he went on to say, encouraging young people to familiarize themselves with the Treaty and spread the word.

Magdelene Wangui, a young woman from Nairobi, Kenya, called on African youth to support those living in the Annex II countries to demand that their governments take an affirmative decision.

Meanwhile, 26-year-old Alan Juarez of Mexico summed it up like this: "We have the power to change the future... We can raise our voices around the world, educate ourselves and change the situation. All these tensions of nuclear weapons and the human rights crises, we have the power to end these problems."

Rizwan Asghar comes from Pakistan, one of the eight countries whose ratification is still pending. "I come from a country where we still have to feed millions of people. At the same time, my country invests billions of dollars in the development of nuclear weapons. I do not understand that rationale. There is no logic in increasing the nuclear arsenal," he said.

"It is time for Pakistan to ratify the Treaty," he stressed, as he invited the youth of his country to use social media networks to generate pressure on politicians with influence in these decisions.

Prior to the adopting of the CTBT in 1996, some 2,000 nuclear tests were carried out worldwide. The US carried out 1,000 of them, followed by the former Soviet Union, which was responsible for 700.

Three countries have broken the de facto moratorium since 1996: India and Pakistan in 1998; and DPRK in 2006, 2009 and 2013, and then again twice in 2016.

Natalia Zhurina of Russia, a country that has already ratified the instrument, underscored the importance of taking that step.

"It is vital because we owe a peaceful future to our children and to the generations to come."