

## Rohingya crisis— what is OIC’s role?

### Time to show its solidarity with Bangladesh and the Rohingya

We appreciate the PM stressing on the need for the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to play a pivotal role in forging unity of the Muslim community and stopping the conflicts among Muslim countries, at a recent meeting with visiting Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif. We do however, believe that the OIC has a wider role to play especially when it comes to the Rohingya crisis, which Bangladesh has been forced to deal with despite having its own constraints. The influx of over a million refugees into a land already burdened with limited resources and a huge population, has taken a huge toll on Bangladesh.

Hence, we cannot help but be puzzled by the lack of interest from the OIC in helping their member Bangladesh to resolve the crisis. The OIC is the second biggest international governmental organisation after the UN, with membership of 57 states from four continents. It represents the Islamic world and seeks to protect its interests. As per the OIC charter, it aims to preserve Islamic values, safeguard and defend national sovereignty and independence of its member states. If the OIC is truly concerned about looking out for Muslims all over the world, why is it so indifferent when it comes to the Rohingya Muslims who have suffered the worst kind of persecution in the land that they once called home? Why is Bangladesh left in the cold to manage such a huge crisis created solely by Myanmar?

In the last OIC summit our PM sought support from the (OIC) member states to launch the Rohingya case at International Court of Justice (ICJ) with voluntary funding and technical help to ensure the legal rights of Rohingyas and address the question of accountability and justice. Unless the Rohingyas are guaranteed safe and dignified return to Myanmar, it will not be possible to repatriate them and this we have witnessed in the second failed attempt at repatriation. Myanmar has not provided any proof of their willingness to create a conducive environment for the Rohingya refugees to return.

The OIC member states can play a significant role in creating the necessary pressure on Myanmar to comply with the basic conditions for voluntary repatriation. And if it continues to ignore this crisis which is debilitating one of its fellow members and humiliating and destroying the lives of Muslims, how can it continue to have any relevance as an organisation that claims to safeguard dignity and rights of the Ummah and strengthen solidarity and cooperation amongst peoples of the Muslim world?

## RHD suffering from dearth of assessments

### Field offices must be brought up to speed

We are bewildered to learn that the Roads and Highways Department (RHD) only has data on the state of 67 bridges out of the 18,000 nationwide. What this tells us is that RHD offices in the field are simply not responding to repeated requests for information from the head office. In the absence of detailed data on the state of bridges, precisely how is RHD going to be able to make recommendations for repairs and maintenance? What we do know is that there are 4,404 bridges, including 856 Bailey bridges and 14,814 culverts. The international cooperation agency JICA, which helped fund and develop a new software called Bridge Management Software (BMS), has actually been pressing RHD to make it effective.

That software would give RHD real-time information for proper planning regarding which bridges and culverts need repair. Officials tell us that putting the BMS into operation is a time-consuming affair. What they do not tell us is that having this software in operation would allow the department to make much more judicious decisions that would ultimately result in better bridge maintenance and save public money. The software was developed at a cost of Tk 31 crore and once the data is collected and stored in the database, RHD officials will have access to detailed information about the “structural health” of infrastructure, which would lead to prolonging their lifespan, since timely repairs will be possible.

It is time for this dilly dallying to stop. In the meanwhile, RHD should draw up a priority list of bridges and culverts that need to be repaired on urgent basis for avoiding traffic mishaps and loss of life. The astronomical figures being demanded from annual budgets for road maintenance are based on “best guess” scenarios and that is precisely why BMS was designed to preclude.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Save the Amazon for our survival

Brazil’s Amazon rainforest has seen a huge jump in the number of fires this year compared to the previous year. Over the past decade, previous governments of Brazil had managed to reduce deforestation with action by federal agencies and a system of fines. But the incumbent Brazilian President Bolsonaro and his ministers have criticised the penalties and overseen a fall in confiscations of timber and convictions for environmental crimes.

For this, conservationists have blamed Mr Bolsonaro, saying he has encouraged loggers and farmers to clear the forest land and he has done nothing to prevent them from clearing the territory. And scientists say the rainforest has suffered losses at an accelerated rate since he took office in January.

Rainforests are often called the lungs of the planet for their role in absorbing carbon dioxide and producing oxygen, upon which all living beings depend for survival. Rainforests also stabilise climate, house incredible number of plants and wildlife, and produce nourishing rainfall. This is why the Amazon rainforest is vital for the survival of Mother Earth.

Md Zillur Rahaman, Gandaria, Dhaka

# Domestic violence: Still a formidable challenge



TALISHA FARUK

AFTER a week’s absence, Nazma entered the house with a lacklustre expression spread across her normally cheerful demeanour, with the slack of her sari pulled low over her face. When questioned in regards to her absence, while hesitant at first, she later revealed that she had been repeatedly threatened, forced to have sexual intercourse, and consequently suffered a miscarriage.

A few weeks prior to Nazma’s revelation, I learned about a friend’s divorce from her longstanding abusive husband. While I was elated at the news that my friend was finally free from the reigns of domestic violence, she revealed how her divorce, instead of securing a life of freedom, had instead thrown her into a custody battle over her only child and had caused further suffering as a result of constant threats from her ex-husband and his family. When the fights became unbearable, my friend turned to both the police as well as her family and received the same dire response: “These things happen in a marriage. Learn to compromise.”

Domestic violence remains an issue irrespective of socioeconomic status in Bangladesh. I hear the same outcry for help from Nazma, whose spouse works as a rickshaw-puller, as I do from a friend, whose former spouse owns a thriving garments company in Bangladesh. This is an issue, which holds no bias.

Violence against women is one of most rampant human rights violations worldwide, and is further exacerbated by unequal power dynamics between women and men that is reinforced by inequalities under the law. According to UN Women, one in five adolescent girls, in Bangladesh, between ages 15 and 19, reported experiencing sexual violence at the hands of their partner. Moreover, more than 80 percent of currently married women have experienced abuse at least once during their marriage, in most cases from individuals they knew and trusted, and more than one in four women experience sexual or physical violence of some sort during their lifetime. In total, according to the Violence Against Women Survey 2011, a nationwide study conducted by the government, at least 87 percent of Bangladeshi women face domestic violence.

There is light at the end of the tunnel, however. Over the last few decades, the country has adopted several laws and policies meant to address violence against women and girls, such as the 2009 High Court’s Directive on Sexual Harassment, the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act (DVPP) 2010, the Women and Child Repression Suppression Act, and the revision and launch of the National Action Plan on violence against women and children in November 2018. Bangladesh further experienced advancements made in terms of policy framework, with victories such as the High Court’s eradication of the degrading “two-finger test” for rape victims and the more recent removal of the term “Kumari” (virgin) from column



SOURCE: WWW.BLONCAMPUS.COM

5 of Bangladesh’s standardised Muslim marriage contract.

In the third chapter of the DVPP Act of 2010, the duties and responsibilities of police officers, enforcement officers (EO) and service providers are detailed. Under Section 4, if a “police officer obtains, by any means whatsoever, the information as to the commission of an act of domestic violence or becomes aware of such occurrence”, such an officer shall inform the survivor of her rights, “including the right to make an application for obtaining relief by way of any order under this Act,” of the availability of medical services, and of the services offered by the EO. The police officer must also inform the individual of her right to free legal help under the Legal Aid Services Act, 2000 and her right to file a formal complaint under other existing laws.

Bangladeshi women’s and human rights organisations, including Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust

shelter services to women and children as they await legal aid.

Furthermore, Maya Apa, a messaging platform provides on-demand health and well-being information online, whereby users can pose their health and legal questions anonymously to experts within the respective fields. This allows users to overcome the social stigma oft-associated with seeking support and discussing sensitive subjects.

With such a myriad of services and legal sanctions in place throughout the country, it was expected that domestic violence against women would decline; yet, current statistics have contradicted such assumptions and violence against women remains widespread.

One of the primary pitfalls within the system lies in the enforcement of legal doctrines, lack of adequate training for law enforcement officers, the public’s inability to navigate the legal arena, and in the inability/refusal to seek refuge when required. As of 2015, only

2.6 percent of women in Bangladesh took legal action against the physical or sexual violence they have endured at the hands of their partners. Cultural norms also make it difficult for women to seek assistance because of the sociocultural stigma associated with seeking legal aid and taking a case to court, which is often equated with “dishonouring the family name”.

Like many battles in Bangladesh, it evidently comes down to which party has more power—the victim or the perpetrator. Even if survivors do manage to access the law, they often experience trauma on their journey to obtain justice. Incidents of police inertia as well as brutal harassment of women are commonplace, along with having to pay bribes to register cases, which often unravel based on political patronage and economic influence. Furthermore, patriarchal social structures, cultural and religious dogma and superstitions further aggravate the problems.

However, the tendency to commit violence within the family is so deeply rooted that it is only by the proper enforcement of law that we can curb it. Moreover, there exists a strong need, for capacity building of institutions, ensuring sufficiency of resources, coupled with education and awareness of the drivers, and increased cooperation between state and non-state actors. As stated by the UN CEDAW Committee, in order to promote Women’s Human Rights, the Bangladeshi government must commit to ensuring greater gender equality, improving service delivery, and heightening access to immediate means of redress, rehabilitation, and protection.

A home is meant to serve as a sanctuary. Unfortunately, it is also a breeding ground for some of the most life-threatening forms of violence. Therefore, the next time we are approached for assistance by a loved one or we witness the suffering of someone we know, we should provide them with the reassurance and direction they so desperately need, for such incidences are not matters to be resolved at home, alone and in fear. Our women are putting enviable successes in different sectors all over the map, and it is high time we do the utmost to encourage their safe and healthy development.

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# Close the door on nuclear testing

DARYL G KIMBALL

EVERYBODY knows that nuclear weapons have been used twice in wartime and with terrible consequences. Often overlooked, however, is the large-scale, postwar use of nuclear weapons.

At least eight countries have conducted 2,056 nuclear test explosions, most of which were far larger than the bombs that levelled Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The United States alone has detonated more than 1,030 nuclear explosions in the atmosphere, underwater, and underground.

Hundreds of thousands of people have died and millions more have suffered from radiation-related illnesses directly caused by the fallout from nuclear testing. The global scale of suffering took too long to come to light.

Secrecy ruled over safety from the start, such as 70 years ago, on August 29, 1949, when the Soviet Union conducted its first nuclear test in eastern Kazakhstan near the secret town of Semipalatinsk-21.

Authorities understood that the test would expose the local population to harmful radioactive fallout, but they pushed ahead in the name of national security, only acknowledging the damage after information leaks in the late-1980s revealed that far more people were exposed to radiation, with more harmful effects, than the Kremlin had previously admitted.

Today, the Kazakh government estimates that Soviet-era testing harmed about 1.5 million people in Kazakhstan alone. A 2008 study by Kazakh and Japanese doctors estimated that the population in areas adjacent to the Semipalatinsk Test Site received an effective dose of 2,000 millisieverts of radiation during the years of testing.

In some hot spots, people were exposed to even higher levels. By comparison, the average American is exposed to about 3 millisieverts of radiation each year. The rate of cancer for people living in eastern Kazakhstan is 25 to 30 percent higher than elsewhere in the country.

By 1989, growing concerns about the health impacts of nuclear testing led ordinary Kazakh citizens to rise up and demand a test moratorium. They formed the Nevada-Semipalatinsk anti-nuclear organisation.

The grassroots movement grew, and popular pressure against testing surged, prompting the Kazakh political establishment, including then-president

of Soviet Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, to finally shut down all nuclear testing at Semipalatinsk on August 29, 1991.

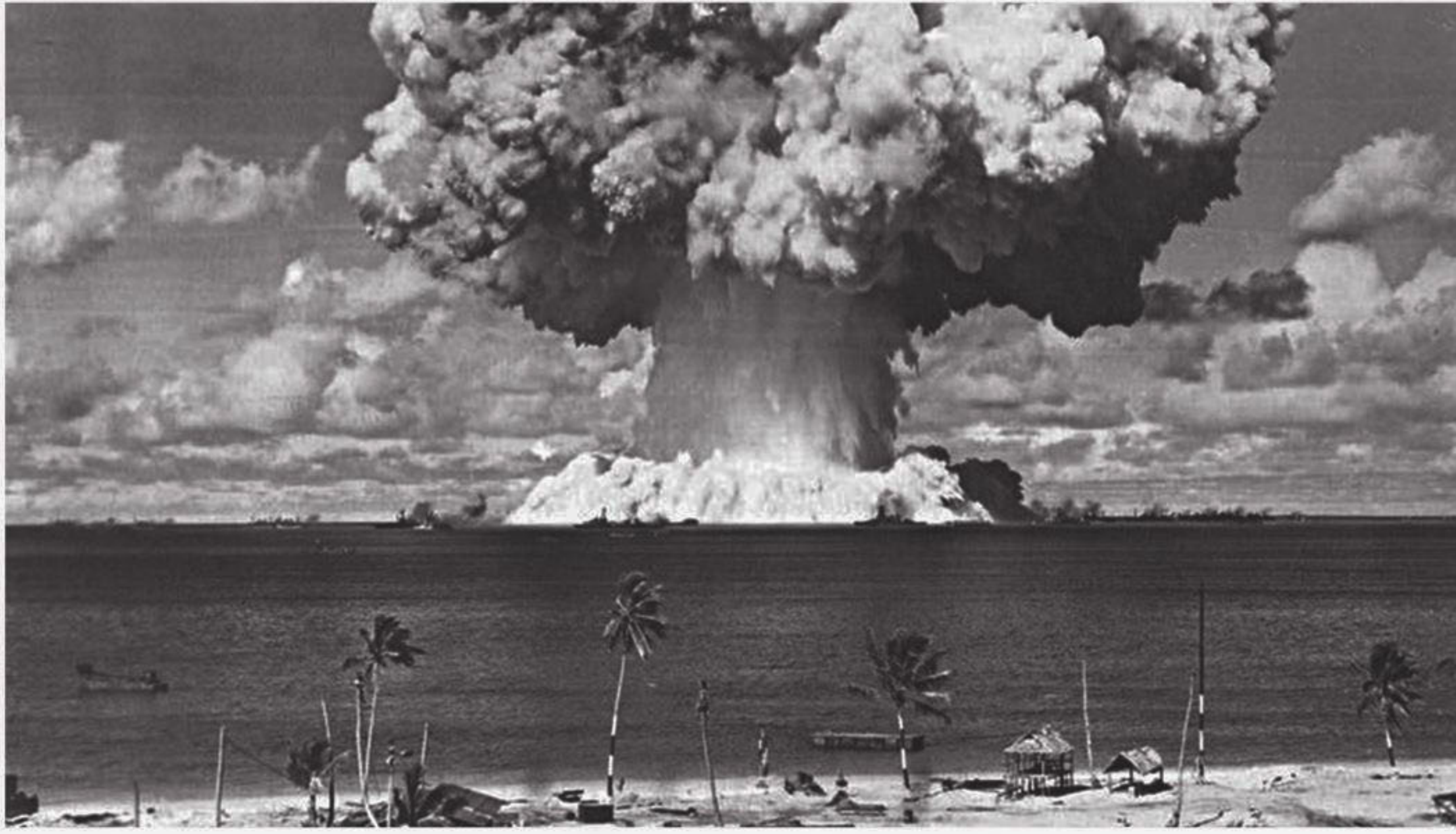
On October 5, 1991, Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev announced a one-year nuclear test moratorium, which led a bipartisan US congressional coalition to introduce legislation to match the Soviet test halt. In 1992 the bill became law over the protestations of President George HW Bush.

The following year, under pressure from civil society leaders and Congress, President Bill Clinton decided to extend

remains ajar. Although the treaty has been signed by 184 states, its entry into force is being held up by eight states, most notably the United States, China, and North Korea, which have refused to ratify the pact.

Making matters worse, the Trump administration has accused Russia of cheating on the CTBT without providing evidence, has falsely asserted there is a lack of clarity about what the CTBT prohibits, and has refused to express support for bringing the CTBT into force.

Given their existing nuclear test moratoria and signatures on the treaty,



The “Baker” underwater nuclear weapons test at Bikini Atoll in 1946. Dozens of World War II vessels were used as targets for this weapons test, and now lie on the Atoll’s lagoon floor.

PHOTO: US NAVY/GIFF JOHNSON

the moratorium and launch talks on the global, verifiable Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), which were concluded in 1996.

The CTBT has established a powerful taboo against nuclear testing. Global support for the treaty, which now has 184 state signatories, is strong, and the treaty’s International Monitoring System is fully operational and more capable than originally envisioned.

Today, for the first time since 1945, no nuclear-armed state has an active nuclear testing programme.

Yet, the door to further nuclear testing

Washington and Beijing already bear most CTBT-related responsibilities. But their failure to ratify has denied them and others the full security benefits of the treaty, including short-notice, on-site inspections to better detect and deter clandestine nuclear testing.

The treaty’s entry into force also would prevent further health injury from nuclear testing and allow responsible states to better address the dangerous legacy of nuclear testing. In Kazakhstan, for example, access to the vast former test site remains restricted. Many areas will remain unusable until and unless the radioactive

Compensation Act of 1990. For the safety and security of future generations and out of respect for the people harmed by nuclear testing, our generation must act. It is time to close and lock the door on nuclear testing by pushing the CTBT holdout states to ratify the treaty and address more comprehensively the devastating human and environmental damage of the nuclear weapons era.

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