UNGA Resolution 78/240 on “Addressing the legacy of nuclear weapons: providing victim assistance and environmental remediation to Member States affected by the use or testing of nuclear weapons”

More than 2000 test-detonsations of nuclear explosive devices have occurred since 1945, most recently in 2017, in the DPRK. These tests were conducted underwater, in the atmosphere and underground, spreading radiation and generating large quantities of nuclear fallout. Ultimately, nuclear testing has an impact on the environment and on public health, such as cancers, genetic disorders or in utero effects on human development.

As the NPT remains the cornerstone of the global disarmament and non-proliferation architecture, it is of the utmost importance to highlight the three pillars of the Treaty – disarmament, non-proliferation and peaceful uses of nuclear energy – and to preserve the impartial, independent and objective work of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

To this matter, Portugal, along with EU partners and NATO allies, is committed to working with civil society, NGOs and think tanks in order to provide victim assistance and environmental remediation to Member States affected by the use or testing of nuclear weapons, promoting coordination among stakeholders.

In the context of the commitments undertaken by Portugal as part of the nuclear fora, it is crucial to strengthen both the support towards the victims of the use or testing of nuclear weapons, as well as the environmental decontamination mechanisms.

Therefore, the following actions are considered relevant for an improved implementation of UNGA Resolution 78/240:

1. **Development of Contingency Plans:** Elaborate and update the current contingency plans specifically designed for handling the use or testing of nuclear weapons, including clear measures for victim assistance, namely evacuation, medical triage, treatment of the wounded and decontamination.

2. **Capacity-building and Training:** Conduct regular simulations and training drills for emergency response personnel, including medical teams, firefighters, police officers and volunteers, in order to provide for a prompt and coordinated response in case of use or testing of nuclear weapons.

3. **Specialized Medical Services:** Guarantee that the victims of the testing or use of nuclear weapons receive immediate access to specialized medical
services, including acute radiation, intensive care and mental health support for post-traumatic stress disorders and other forms of trauma.

4. **Nuclear Health Reference Centers**: Establish nuclear health reference centers equipped with cutting-edge technology and specialized teams to provide for advanced diagnosis and treatment for radiation victims.

5. **International Cooperation**: Strengthen international cooperation and the exchange of best practices between the signatory parties of the nuclear conventions, facilitating resource, knowledge, and experience-sharing in the victim assistance field.

6. **Public Awareness and Education**: Launch public awareness campaigns and educational programs to inform the population about the security protocols carried out in the event of the use or testing of nuclear weapons and radiation victims’ rights.

7. **Environmental Decontamination**: Recognize the indispensable role of the IAEA’s “Radiation Safety and Monitoring Section” in the primary areas of radiation monitoring, environmental remediation, and waste management.

Portugal fully supports the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and urges every State listed in Annex II to ratify it, so that this international instrument can enter into force, upholding and complementing the NPT regime, besides unlocking the on-site inspections and reinforcing confidence-building measures.