

Eleventh Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons
General Debate
United Nations
New York

H.E. John M. Silk, Ambassador & Permanent Representative of the
Republic of the Marshall Islands to the United Nations
29 April 2026

check against delivery

Mr. President,

The Republic of the Marshall Islands expresses its gravest concern that the world is slipping into a dangerous and growing level of nuclear risk. We have always urged meaningful progress wherever it can be achieved between nuclear powers and with the world as a whole, to reduce and eliminate nuclear weapons.

The NPT - and multilateral disarmament- does not exist in a vacuum, and words do not gain compliance only because diplomats insist upon it. Such pragmatism seems often endangered on the negotiating floor. We support your leadership, Ambassador Do Hung Viet, in guiding us all during this meeting to build better bridges.

Mr. President,

We are joined in our common concern by many, including our Pacific Islands Forum, and, other nations which are also, like the Marshall Islands, signatories to the Rarotonga Treaty establishing a South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone. Our experience as a region, and the direct experience of the Marshall Islands, is a compelling lesson for the world to act.

The Republic of the Marshall Islands, during its time as a UN Trust Territory, experienced 67 large-scale surface tests of nuclear weapons, undertaken by the UN Administering Authority, the United States, between 1946 and 1958.

At the time of testing, and on every possible occasion in the intervening

years, the Marshall Islands has informed UN members of the devastating impacts -- of medical surveillance as test subjects, of death and ongoing health impacts inherited through generations, of our displaced populations who still live in exile or who were resettled in unsafe circumstances, and then had to be removed. Even today, science remains a moving target and our exiled local communities are still struggling with resettlement.

Mr. President,

Many of the tests were undertaken after Marshallese leaders petitioned the UN to halt these tests, and in 1954 and 1956 some of these leaders traveled to these same halls in New York, and despite assurances of our wellbeing, the tests continued under the auspices of U.N. Trusteeship Resolutions 1082 and 1493. Visiting Missions and annual sessions continued to address the issue. Eventually, concern over our exposure helped achieve the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty.

Mr. President,

The UN General Assembly has recognized humanitarian consequences, as well as the impacts upon victims on nuclear testing, in addition to the UN Human Rights Council with resolution 57/77 on Marshall Islands. The International Day Against Nuclear Testing, established by General Assembly resolution 64/35, is a key umbrella to address all peoples who experienced exposure.

In NPT Review Conferences in 1995 - and again in 2000 - member states recognized that a special responsibility exists towards former UN Trust Territories adversely affected by weapons tests conducted under the auspices of the UN. Strong steps have since been taken - including establishment of a national nuclear commission to coordinate effort - but huge challenges remain.

Mr. President,

We support the joint submission led by Kiribati to Working Group III regarding impacts of nuclear testing, and we emphasize the importance of progress on an outcome which recognizes the responsibility- and obligation - to address the historical wrongs - and contemporary challenges- of testing impacts.

Mr. President,

Since 1954, the Marshallese people have urged the world to hear our voice. To hear the voice of those who have been displaced, banned and otherwise set adrift from some of their islands; to hear the voice of Marshallese mothers who have given birth to children with deformities or a stillborn baby that looks like a jelly fish, and the increasing rate of children born with autism; to hear the voice of the Marshallese people who we believe have the highest cancer rate in the Pacific.

Finally, Mr. President, my generation is here today to echo the voice of our Marshallese leaders who came to these halls in 1954 and 1956. As you walk these halls, and if you take a few moments, you might hear their voice and their calls to bring an end to nuclear arms.

Kommol tata, thank you.