

The Legacy of the Treaty of Tlatelolco on the Eve of a New Millennium

by

Jayantha Dhanapala

Under-Secretary-General

Department for Disarmament Affairs

United Nations



*XVI General Conference of the Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons
in Latin America and the Caribbean (OPANAL)*

1 December 1999

Ambassador Jorge Valdez, Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs of Peru,

Mr. Enrique Roman-Morey, Secretary-General of OPANAL,

Your Excellencies,

Distinguished participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to represent the United Nations here today on the occasion of the 16th General Conference of OPANAL, the Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean. This is of course the last such General Conference that the agency will convene this millennium. As such, it offers a unique opportunity to reflect upon mankind's greatest security challenge: the global elimination of all nuclear weapons and, in particular, the role of regional efforts in achieving this end.

This goal was enshrined in the Treaty of Tlatelolco, the treaty that originated the concept of a continental nuclear-weapon-free zone over 30 years ago. Since then, other international instruments have been used to exclude nuclear weapons from three additional continents -- Antarctica, Africa, and Australia -- as well as from the South Pacific and Southeast Asia. I have no doubt that the world will witness the establishment of new zones excluding such weapons, including in Central Asia. By treaty, these weapons have also been excluded from deployment on the seabed and in outer space, including the moon and other celestial bodies.

In addition, a remarkable 182 non-nuclear-weapon states have undertaken legally-binding obligations under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) not to acquire such weapons. And with their signatures of the Comprehensive-Test-Ban Treaty, 155 nations have agreed not to test any nuclear explosive device regardless of size or physical location. We should also acknowledge the general decline over the last decade in the numbers of nuclear weapons that have been deployed around the world.

Yet prospects for nuclear disarmament remain clouded. The chronic standstill in strategic arms reductions talks -- and the corresponding deadlock that has long existed in the Conference on Disarmament -- has led some observers to wonder if even "arms control" is dead, while others see nuclear disarmament as a hopeless goal. Furthermore, the nuclear tests in South Asia in 1998 have surely hindered rather than helped the growth of global norms against the testing, proliferation, and possession of nuclear weapons. And in sharp contrast to the inspirational language in the preamble of the Treaty of Tlatelolco about the dangers of nuclear weapons, several countries either declaring or re-affirming military doctrines praising the alleged security benefits of nuclear weapons and rationalizing their use. Meanwhile, recent developments in both missile proliferation and missile defense present new threats to further progress in nuclear disarmament.

In this context, people in the region defined by the Treaty of Tlatelolco have every reason to be proud of their accomplishment. They should be proud because their model for regional security has been copied by so many other countries. As envisioned by H.E. Ambassador Alfonso Garcia Robles and his colleagues a generation ago, the treaty has delivered enormous security benefits while also saving considerable national resources -- resources that have been and will continue to be devoted to more

socially productive pursuits. It is well to remind ourselves and citizens everywhere of the real dividends from peace and disarmament.

Yet new challenges lie ahead. These challenges relate to maintaining strong diplomatic efforts to reinvigorate the strategic arms reductions process and to encourage greater transparency throughout that process. The challenge remains of improving the security guarantees of members of such zones, to ensure unambiguously that no member will ever again be threatened by the use of nuclear weapons. The challenge remains of ensuring that countries that transport nuclear materials through nuclear-weapon-free zones do not create new environmental hazards or offer enticing new targets for terrorists. The challenges remain of achieving full hemispheric membership in the Treaty of Tlatelolco, and of gaining universal membership in the NPT and CTBT.

It may be safely assumed that no chronic global problem can be solved by any one government or institution. In accordance with the UN Charter, the United Nations has worked closely with regional organizations in the pursuit of global goals including in the field of international peace and security. I am pleased today to acknowledge the recent decision of the OPANAL Council to endorse the cooperation which will begin tomorrow between OPANAL and the Lima-based UN Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean. This cooperation will help all countries in the region to meet concrete security challenges and will, I believe, serve well the broader peace and security goals found in the Treaty of Tlatelolco and the UN Charter.

Mr. President, distinguished participants, the achievement of these goals will not be easy. It will require an unrelenting political will. It will require a stable institutional framework, one that combines the necessity for permanence with a capability of adapting to ever-changing circumstances. It will require an extraordinary level of cooperation both within regions and between regional and global organizations. It will require enlightened leadership at the national level, one that understands how the national interest is served by initiatives on behalf of the global interest. It requires, in short, an ensemble of activities not unlike those which comprise the history of the Treaty of Tlatelolco and OPANAL.

It is in this spirit of appreciation, hope, and confidence that I wish you a fruitful Conference.