

# Promoting Non-Proliferation: The Role of International Organizations

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I would like to begin by thanking FLACSO-Chile, and in particular its director, Dr. Claudio Fuentes, for inviting me to speak today on the role of international organizations in promoting nuclear non-proliferation. I know that experts at FLACSO have long had an interest in the work of the United Nations—which is not surprising given that FLACSO was created in 1957 as a UNESCO initiative—but I am especially grateful to see that “the nuclear challenge” was selected as a theme for this workshop.

This subject merits close attention because of what is at stake if the world fails to rise to this challenge. All people are preoccupied with their daily concerns, while few worry about events outside their borders that they cannot control, and fewer still recognize the need to act to address these larger challenges. We all suffer from this temptation to let fate control the evolution of world events—to assume that, somehow, these difficult problems will somehow work themselves out. This frustrating tendency is evident with respect to many global problems, including the warming of our climate, the alleviation of chronic world poverty, the prevention of HIV/AIDS, and most certainly, the many challenges associated with nuclear weapons.

The first such challenge relates to dangers from existing nuclear weapons—and these include risks of accidents, unauthorized use, their vulnerability to terrorist attack or theft, environmental hazards from their development and production, and of course, the horrific effects of their wilful use, whether as a weapon of pre-emption or in retaliation for some other kind of attack, nuclear or conventional.

There are an estimated 26,000 such weapons in the world today—almost two decades after the end of the Cold War, and four decades after the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) was opened for signature, a treaty that committed its parties to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to nuclear disarmament.

Cynics look at this record and conclude that the goal of global nuclear disarmament is a fantasy. For them, the only practical options relate to the second and third challenges of nuclear weapons—namely, to prevent the global spread of such weapons to additional states and to prevent non-state actors from acquiring them. Those who prefer an exclusive focus on only these two nuclear challenges often cite the need to keep such weapons from “falling into the wrong hands”—words that do not rest well with the NPT, which envisages a world with nuclear weapons in no one’s hands.

At the UN today, and in many other international arenas—including the periodic meetings of the states parties to the NPT—we continue to witness what amounts to a debate between proponents of one view or the other: nuclear disarmament must come before nuclear non-proliferation, or vice versa. As did his predecessor, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has consistently rejected this false choice, and has instead argued that both goals are vital to international peace and security and must be pursued together. He has referred to these as “global public goods”, underscoring that they represent types of challenges that no state can meet alone, and that all states must cooperate in addressing. The peaceful uses of nuclear energy constitute another such global public good. Harnessing the awesome power of the atom for the benefit of humankind, rather than

to create instruments for its annihilation is also a formidable challenge for which States must find solutions acceptable to all.

Fortunately, cooperation among states in the search for effective nuclear disarmament measures is not limited only to their bilateral diplomatic exchanges. It takes place in a variety of multilateral arenas and is facilitated and promoted by concrete activities of international organizations. The United Nations is without question the focal point for multilateral cooperation in addressing all these nuclear challenges—disarmament, non-proliferation, promoting peaceful uses, and in developing norms against nuclear terrorism. Disarmament is deeply embedded in the history of the UN, and has become part of the organization's identity. This goal appears in the UN Charter and the UN has in fact been seeking the elimination of all weapons “adaptable to mass destruction”—including specifically nuclear weapons—since 24 January 1946, when the General Assembly devoted its first resolution to this issue.

By 1959, the UN General Assembly formally adopted the goal of “general and complete disarmament under effective international control”, which remains today the ultimate objective of the UN in this field. General and complete disarmament simply means the goal of eliminating all weapons of mass destruction, while limiting conventional arms exclusively for use in legitimate national defence activities, such as defending borders, maintaining domestic order, and contributing to international peacekeeping operations. States have a legitimate right to defend themselves, a right that is fully consistent both with the UN Charter and with the multilateral goal of general and complete disarmament.

In the early 1960s, the world community increasingly recognized that prospects for concluding a single treaty to achieve this goal were not auspicious, and efforts focused more on establishing some interim stepping stones—then called “partial measures”—that would at least lead toward that goal. Thus, in the decades that followed, the world witnessed a significant growth of regional nuclear-weapon-free zones, starting with the Tlatelolco Treaty, which established the first such zone in an entire populated continent. Chile was one of the staunchest proponents of this Treaty. Other such zones followed first in the South Pacific, then Southeast Asia, Africa, and most recently Central Asia. The world community also adopted multilateral treaties to prevent the orbiting of weapons of mass destruction or their placement on the moon or other celestial bodies, to make the continent of Antarctica into a demilitarized zone, and to prohibit the placement of any weapons of mass destruction on the seabed.

The United States and Soviet Union, the states with the largest nuclear arsenals, were able to conclude several bilateral treaties to reduce their respective holdings of nuclear weapons and their delivery vehicles. They jointly negotiated the initial draft of what would become the NPT. Eventually, both states would announce a moratorium on nuclear testing and stop producing fissile nuclear materials for weapons. France, the Russian Federation, and the United Kingdom joined the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), and also, as acts of national policy, announced that they had stopped producing fissile material for weapons. While China is maintaining its own moratorium on nuclear testing, neither the United States nor China has yet ratified the CTBT.

The history of nuclear-weapons programmes would not be complete without recording the decisions by Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine to give up the nuclear weapons on their soil after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. South Africa also abandoned its nuclear weapon programme as did Libya. A number of additional States might have chosen to develop their own capabilities to acquire nuclear weapons, but decided against that option. While different reasons explain those decisions in each case, the important consequence is that the overwhelming majority of the members of the international community decided not to make their security dependent on the possession of nuclear weapons. Thus, despite serious misgivings, over almost four decades, most States gradually became Parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Only three states have not joined the NPT: Israel, Pakistan, and India, and one, the People's Democratic Republic of Korea (DPRK), has withdrawn from it. Today, the treaty is almost as close to universal membership as the UN Charter itself.

On first glance, it appears that much of this progress came as a result of unilateral actions or bilateral agreements that did not involve either the UN or other global organizations. This conclusion is not entirely accurate. While the NPT was initially drafted by two countries, which reportedly held consultations with a few others, it was deliberated in the Eighteen Nation Disarmament Committee and later approved by the General Assembly. The treaty's safeguards system is administered not by the great powers, but by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Indeed, most of the broader multilateral norms for disarmament and non-proliferation emerged from a network of institutions known as the UN disarmament machinery, created in 1978 by the First Special Session of the General Assembly on Disarmament, known as SSOD I. Two other Special Sessions of the General Assembly have been devoted to disarmament. In the person of its Alternate Representative in New York, Ambassador Alfredo Labbé, Chile has been constructively involved in bringing about the convening of a Fourth Special Session. The existing machinery consists of the UN Disarmament Commission, which serves as the General Assembly's deliberative body to develop guidelines on nuclear disarmament and conventional arms control issues. This machinery also includes the General Assembly's First Committee, which annually considers and adopts over 50 resolutions on disarmament issues—another important step in developing multilateral norms. The Conference of Disarmament, meanwhile, remains the world's single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum.

Other components of this machinery include the Office for Disarmament Affairs in the Secretariat, which also oversees the work of the UN's three regional peace and disarmament centres in Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia and the Pacific. The Geneva-based UN Institute for Disarmament Research, meanwhile, continues to produce authoritative studies on a wide range of disarmament and arms control issues ranging literally from small arms to weapons in space.

It is true, however, that much of this multilateral disarmament machinery is facing its own significant challenges—especially the most difficult challenge of all: forging a consensus within the world community on concrete actions to achieve disarmament and non-proliferation goals. Earlier this year, the UN Disarmament Commission had to adjourn without being able to reach a consensus on the substantive issues of nuclear disarmament and conventional arms control on its agenda. The

First Committee remains deeply divided especially in votes dealing with nuclear-weapons issues—last year, several resolutions were adopted over the strong objections of some key States, while a significant number chose to abstain on 19 of such resolutions.

For its part, the Conference on Disarmament has not been able to agree on a substantive programme of work for over a decade. Most of its members want negotiations to begin on a fissile material treaty, though some also want negotiations on nuclear disarmament and measures to prevent an arms race in outer space—but given the CD's consensus rule, if everything is not agreed, nothing is agreed.

Meanwhile, diplomats and commentators around the world are citing a “crisis of confidence” in the NPT, a crisis due as much to worries over persisting proliferation threats as to the lack of significant progress in disarmament, and to apparent discrimination in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, including even cooperation that benefits non-parties.

Beyond the NPT, the current debate on peaceful uses centres on proposals for the adoption of more stringent and intrusive norms of verification and the establishment of a system that would assure supply of nuclear materials for peaceful purposes and at the same time prevent proliferation. States remain deeply divided on these issues. Other observers note the absence of multilateral legal norms for missiles and other means of delivering nuclear weapons.

Efforts to prevent nuclear terrorism have made more progress—in 2004, the Security Council adopted resolution 1540, which required states to prevent the proliferation and terrorist acquisition of all weapons of mass destruction, and a year later, the General Assembly formally adopted the International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism. However, there is a clear need for closer and more effective international cooperation in this field.

As I look at this overall record, I see much that has been accomplished, and much that remains to be done. The world clearly needs additional efforts to advance the cause of nuclear disarmament—and I would view the announcement of new strategic arms reductions as an important first step in that direction, especially if such steps are backed by high standards of verification, transparency, irreversibility, and binding legal commitments. The world will recognize progress in this area when all states possessing such weapons develop and start implementing concrete operational plans for achieving disarmament goals. The entry into force of the CTBT and negotiation of a fissile material treaty would substantially advance both disarmament and non-proliferation goals.

With respect specifically to non-proliferation, however, I believe the world is watching carefully to see what will happen prior to the 2010 NPT Review Conference. Preparatory work for this Conference has already started with some encouraging signs, but the real problems have hardly been seriously looked at. Many states, for instance, wish to see progress in establishing a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East—this goal was agreed at the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference and has been endorsed by over 30 UN General Assembly resolutions. Failure to even make an initial step toward this goal would not bode well for a happy outcome in 2010—

nor, frankly, would a failure to resolve international concerns over nuclear activities in Iran and the DPRK. In addition, work must be intensified now in order to avoid the substantive and procedural hurdles that prevented progress in the 2005 Review Conference.

Achieving global nuclear disarmament will be difficult under any circumstances, but it will be virtually impossible to achieve in a world in which more and more states are acquiring such weapons. Conversely, nuclear disarmament cannot be achieved if the current possessors keep working on their improvement, developing rationales for their retention, constructing defence doctrines based on their use or gaining concrete economic, political, or technological benefits from their acquisition. Proliferation and discrimination are obstacles, not catalysts, to disarmament.

In such a climate, I believe that political will and leadership by key states—especially those possessing nuclear weapons—will be crucial in the years ahead, certainly crucial in making significant progress in international organizations, including the UN disarmament machinery. While such leadership may be necessary, it will not alone be sufficient to confront all the world's nuclear challenges.

All members of such organizations—as well as those who work in relevant international secretariats—have their own roles to play in building support for multilateral efforts in confronting these challenges. My own Office for Disarmament Affairs has official mandates to promote multilateral cooperation in these areas, to work with member states and diverse non-governmental organizations, to promote education in the fields of disarmament and non-proliferation, and even to advance gender perspectives on disarmament. We also work closely with other intergovernmental and regional organizations—including those represented on this panel today—and this cooperation will likely grow in the years ahead.

I strongly believe that leaders of all States—despite all the other competing priorities that they face each day—must speak out more on disarmament issues, not just in multilateral events such as the opening of new sessions of the General Assembly or at NPT gatherings, but also in their bilateral relations with nuclear-weapon states, while deepening their engagement with civil society. When we see concrete national plans, budgets, and institutions to implement disarmament commitments, we will know for sure that real progress is being made.

I will now conclude by thanking the Governments of Chile and Norway, not just for supporting this event, but for demonstrating year after year their strong national commitments to promoting multilateral cooperation meeting global nuclear challenges. If we saw a greater international proliferation of this type of vision and wisdom, surely the world would be a better and a safer place.