



AGENCY FOR THE PROHIBITION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS IN
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

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Side Event

“Tlatelolco at 50

The Continued Relevance and Potential of Nuclear Weapon-Free-Zones”

“Founding ideas underlying the creation of the Latin American Nuclear Weapon-Free-Zone
and their relevance in the current nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation context”

Statement by

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Vienna International Center

Chair of GRULAC and Permanent Representative of Venezuela, Ambassador Mr. Jesse Chacón
Director General of the IAEA, Mr. Yukiya Amano
Co-panelists Ambassador Rafael Mariano Grossi and Ms Gaukhar Mukhatzhanova
Ambassadors,
Representatives,
Representatives of the Civil Society,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the Permanent Representative of Venezuela, current Chair of GRULAC, for having graciously organized this event and of course, all of you for being here.

We cannot escape History when considering the ideas that nurtured the Treaty of Tlatelolco.

The Iberian origin of Latin American States (not forgetting that the nations themselves were more complex with their indigenous and African components) was the basis for a sense of community. Bolivar understood this and fostered the idea of Latin America. Much later of course the Caribbean countries came to enrich this community of States.

It took some 200 years for this community to materialize under the form of CELAC – Community of Latin American and Caribbean States.

In the meantime, our countries, although independent, developed in a world of European hegemony later replaced by a North American one. Since the end of the XIX century the framework of our regional relations was identified by the now almost forgotten term “pan-americanism”.

There were several Inter-American conferences since 1890, one particularly notable: the Chapultepec Conference in 1945 in the aftermath of World War II.

The first decade of the Cold War found a Latin America allied to the Western bloc. This would evolve in the late 1950s and early 60s when other forces and events would make more complex building common positions in Latin America.

The 1962 Missile Crisis brought a new component to the political sensibility of the region, stressing therein the difference between the Eastern and Western positions. However, at the same time, the ideas of non-alignment resulting from the 1955 Bandung Conference increasingly echoed throughout Latin America.

In 1962, Latin America was confronted by the fact that it was not geographically alien to the risk of a nuclear war but had suddenly become the location with its highest possibility.

With this background, it is very interesting to consider how the negotiation of Tlatelolco, held between 1964 and 1967, resulted gradually in the establishment of a system capable of uniting the Latin American and Caribbean region.

Along that negotiation, energy was invested in the invention of an unprecedented institute of International Law and all aspects relating to its proper functioning.

This institute, which would later be coined by the expression of “Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone”, required precise rules to guarantee the enforcement of the proscription of nuclear weapons. In addition, the contracting parties understood it was necessary to establish a mechanism in charge of ensuring compliance with the obligations set forth by the Treaty of Tlatelolco and of internationally developing its concepts.

States of the Latin American region realized that they had to set aside ideological and political differences if they wanted to guarantee peace in the region and ensure the survival of their inhabitants.

The Treaty of Tlatelolco, with its brevity and simplicity, is characterized by an admirable political engineering which has been functioning to perfection over the last 50 years and has inspired four other regions.

Preambles are undoubtedly integral parts of treaties themselves. They cannot be considered ornaments or general presentations, as opera ouvertures.

The founding ideas of the creation of the Latin American and Caribbean Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone are stated in the preamble of the Treaty of Tlatelolco.

The Preamble includes the underlying aims of the Treaty. They can be summarized in the following eight points:

1. Strengthening a world at peace based on the sovereign equality of States;
2. Ending the armaments race, especially in the nuclear field;
3. Total prohibition of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction of any type;
4. General and complete disarmament under effective international control;
5. Prevention of the proliferation of nuclear weapons;
6. Guaranteeing security for the military denuclearized zones;
7. Use of nuclear energy exclusively for peaceful purposes;
8. Right to the greatest and most equitable possible access to this new source of energy in order to accelerate economic and social development.

The preamble clearly explains that NWFZs “are not an end in themselves but rather a means for achieving general and complete disarmament at a later stage”.

With Tlatelolco, Latin America and the Caribbean provided themselves with political credentials to act as a bloc and participate more intensely in the debates and international negotiations on the ban of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, on non-proliferation and on correlated matters regarding international security.

The first idea in the Preamble refers to a “world at peace based on the sovereign equality of States”. It could not be more accurate since nuclear weapons are precisely the most serious obstacles to a truly democratic international system. The nuclear weapon is an instrument of political oppression in international relations; it cannot coexist with democracy.

The third and fourth aims, which refer to the total prohibition of nuclear weapons and general nuclear disarmament under effective international control, became more attainable in 2017 with the ongoing UN Conference to negotiate an instrument to ban nuclear weapons convened by General Assembly Resolution 71/258.

As long as nuclear weapons are legal and continue to exist, the fifth goal contained in the preamble concerning non-proliferation will continue to be promoted by OPANAL Member States.

Noble Peace laureate and leader in the negotiation of the Treaty of Tlatelolco, Ambassador Alfonso García Robles, believed that the idea behind the institute of nuclear-weapon-free zone was that it would expand progressively until territories infested with nuclear-weapons were reduced to “quarantine zones” or “contaminated islets”. In this way, the less space available for nuclear weapons, the greatest probability of delegitimizing their existence. The fact that 115 countries are in nuclear-weapon-free zones and their participation in the UN negotiation of a treaty banning nuclear weapons prove the validity of the idea born half a century ago.

Thank you.