

SECRETARIAT

**Statement of Ambassador Gioconda Ubeda,
Secretary General of OPANAL
Plenary Meeting of the Conference on Disarmament**

Geneva, 16 June 2011

Mister President,

Please receive my gratefulness for the opportunity of participate in this session of the Conference on Disarmament, as Secretary General of the Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean (OPANAL). I believe that this is a good time for it; it is a good time for sharing the agenda of each one of the international and regional organizations that works for the disarmament purpose, especially, nuclear disarmament.

In a long term vision, started in 1945 with the sign of the United Nations Charter, we find ourselves, without a doubt, facing a new wave in nuclear disarmament and no proliferation matters, and with it, facing new challenges. The global political reality claims to move forward in disarmament, a responsibility of all the States, especially of those in possession of nuclear weapons, of the international organizations and, on its own measure, of the organized civil society.

As well as the Conference on Disarmament and its predecessors, OPANAL is conceived in a temporal long reach projection, since the origin of the military denuclearization of the Zone until today, a long period tagged by stages of remarkable developments and other more paused. In this new stage, the Agency has to resize the importance of being the Nuclear Weapon Free Zone (NWFZ) of Latin America and the Caribbean and, with this, its function not of and end in itself but rather a mean for achieving general, irreversible and complete nuclear disarmament.

Very briefly, I would like to mention that the practice and concept of Nuclear Weapons Free Zones in highly populated areas started in Latin America in 1967 with the signature of the Treaty of Tlatelolco, which entered into force in 1969. That same year, OPANAL was created, an Agency which mission is to watch over the fulfillment of the Treaty's purposes.

35 years passed before the 33 States of the region totally integrated the Zone. It was in 2002 when Cuba ratified the Treaty, having signed it in 1995. Precisely, it was during the first half of the 90's, that the Treaty got an important number of signs and ratifications, for example, Brasil, Chile and Argentina ratified it in 1994 and six Caribbean countries were fully incorporated between 1992 and 1997.

These 35 long showed us that the legal and political will of States in order to consolidate as a Nuclear Weapon Free Zone is solid; that the road has been curve, but layout by the search of possible agreements. As all in this room know, the construction of possible agreements can happen thanks to the trust and flexibility, that is our daily work field.

The Treaty of Tlatelolco was a novelty and a necessary response in a context in which the nuclear arm race was in its cusp and a few months after the Missile Crises occurred, in 1962, that was also the year in which were registered the highest number of nuclear tests, 117 above-ground tests, and 61 underground.

With the leadership of Emeritus Ambassador and Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Mexico, His Excellency Alfonso García Robles, the Treaty of Tlatelolco was reactive to that situation and preventive towards the future. Today, after almost 45 years, we are certain that it was a visionary decision, achieved thanks to a lot of efforts:

In reference to that historic moment, I quote the words of United Nations Secretary General of that moment, Mr. U Thant, addressed to the Preparatory Commission for the Latin America Denuclearization (COPREDAL), on 12 February 1967, during the approval of the Treaty of Tlatelolco:

“The Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America constitutes an important stage in the long and difficult quest for disarmament... It also establishes the necessary statute for the creation, for the first time in history, of a denuclearized zone in a populated area of the planet... Latin American Nations can, with high level of satisfaction, be proud of what they achieved on their own initiative and by their own efforts.”

The Treaty of Tlatelolco was in its moment, also an important contribution to International Law, being both a reference and an inspiration to other Nuclear Weapon Free Zones that came out after: in 1985 in the South Pacific, with the Treaty of Rarontonga (18 years after Tlatelolco); in 1995, with the Treaty of Bangkok, in Southeast Asia; and one year after, with the Treaty of Pelindaba, in the African Continent. This last one, as well as the Treaty that establishes the NWFZ of Central Asia, entered into force in 2009, which makes today five existing NWFZ and Mongolia as a unilaterally declared nuclear weapon free State, in 2000.

Specifically about the Treaty of Tlatelolco, I would like to remember in this Conference, that it incorporates three elements that define it in its totality and that are still in force, in which the States:

1. Agree to limit themselves in the tests, use, fabrication, production or acquisition, of any nuclear weapon, in order to avoid proliferation of this type of weapons, at the same time that they contribute to peace maintenance and regional security.
2. Conceive that the Nuclear Weapon Free Zone is a mean for achieving general and complete disarmament, considering that nuclear weapons States have also the responsibilities and obligations guarantying the Zone military denuclearization (by Additional Protocols I y II)
3. Reaffirm and guarantee Member States its right to peaceful use of nuclear energy, establishing a control system and international obligations at the same time.

Now, I would like to briefly refer to the importance of NWFZ and their role today in matters of nuclear disarmament.

In their origin, NWFZ were conceived as dykes by the will of the States that integrate them. As dykes to protect specific territories from No Proliferation and to obtain guaranty from the nuclear weapons states of “...not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against the Contracting Parties of the Treaty...” (Article 3 of the Additional Protocol II of the Treaty of Tlatelolco).

Under United Nations scope, the importance of the contribution of NWFZ for regional and international peace and security, has been continuously recognized; also, its contribution to the non proliferation regime and to nuclear weapons objectives. It is a clear and consolidated matter, but without general and complete disarmament, NWFZ are in the middle of the river, and they have to cross to the other side. In this sense, the negative security assurances would only be enough if they are total, for the residents of NWFZ, as well as for all humanity. The 114 NWFZ Member States are convinced, and they have expressed it in different forums, to move towards a universal, legally binding agreement that guarantee the not use or threat to use nuclear weapons against countries that doesn't have it. We encourage the efforts to make important steps in that direction in this Conference.

Mister President and Member States representatives, we hope that relevant steps are taken soon in this Conference.

Today, the reason to exist of the NWFZ overcome the dykes or islands, overcome the concept of the origin, and have to evolve into their goal, until becoming bridges in the complex architecture of global nuclear disarmament. Towards that space have to be addressed all the efforts, find the way and the time is the current most important challenge.

This work has started with the five NWFZ plus Mongolia, that have already celebrated two Nuclear Weapon Free Zones Conferences, in 2005 and 2010, the first one organized by Mexico and OPANAL and the second one coordinated by Chile.

Also, in the last years the creation and consolidation of NWFZ has moved forward. 2009 was an important year; the Treaty of Pelindaba and the Treaty of Central Asia entered into force. This is also an important year, Russia ratified the Treaty of Pelindaba Protocols and the Executive of the United States sent to the Senate for its ratification the Protocols of Pelindaba and of Rarotonga.

On their part, African States started last May operative work of the African Commission of Nuclear Energy (AFCONE). We have to keep in mind that since 1969, with the Treaty of Tlatelolco, until now, another NWFZ creates an organization specialized in watching over the compliance of the Treaty's purposes.

We welcome and celebrate this African initiative. This is a sign that the coordination work between both Zones could be easier.

Nevertheless, the work between the NWFZ is barely beginning and it is necessary to identify effective measures that promotes coordination and cooperation among them. In this sense, the OPANAL receives with enthusiasm proposals like the one of Brazil of creating an informal group of countries NWFZ friends, and the reiterated interest from Mexico of facilitating the work among NWFZ.

I allowed myself to make a call to the most active countries in the other areas where NWFZ have been established, so they also take the leadership towards the III NWFZ Conference, that will be in 2015. It is expected that this work would start in the framework of the Preparatory Conferences of the Member States of the Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The final documents of the above mentioned Conferences are the starting point, now we have to implement a common agenda. To unite NWFZ efforts towards a convention or agreement that bans nuclear weapons, would be the natural path of their joint actions and existential purpose. The 114 States have much to say in this legitimate aspiration.

From the Secretariat General of OPANAL and with the commitment of Member States, we can assure you that we will continue working in order to consolidate the Zone and to build the bridges towards a nuclear weapon free world.

We can assure you that we will continue implementing the educational programs for nuclear disarmament. Among them, the course online on Nuclear Challenges that is

given by the Secretariat since 2009, under the academic coordination of Ambassador Miguel Marin Bosch. This course will be offered in English for the first time next fall. We hope that in the near future, representatives from other Nuclear Weapons Free Zones States and others join this initiative.

That we will continue talking to the nuclear powers, which are part of the Treaty, in order for them to modify or withdraw the interpretative declarations made to the additional protocols during its sign and/or ratification.

That we will continue working along with the CTBTO in order that the three countries of our region, that haven't done it yet, ratify the Complete Test Ban Treaty.

That we will continue promoting actions in order to achieve an effective coordination among all NWFZ, above all, in matters that have the purpose of boosting measures towards the complete and general nuclear disarmament.

That we will be willing of collaborate in the creation or improvement of other NWFZ. In this point, we cherish the international community's interest to create a Mass Destruction Weapons Free Zone in the Middle East. For these purposes, we put on disposition the pertinent good practices and lessons learned in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Finally, I would like to thank Ambassador Luis Felipe de Macedo Soares, for the effective coordination of the works of OPANAL in the Conference on Disarmament, that the Mission under his mandate has been doing and will do for all 2011. We hope that this is just the beginning to strengthen dialogue and information exchange, between OPANAL and the Conference. I thank Mexico for being the pioneer of this works during the second half of 2010. Guatemala, Uruguay and Costa Rica, are collaborating in this same sense in New York, to the United Nations. And the same for Jamaica with CARICOM countries.

This coordination mechanism in different multilateral forums are a novelty in the Agency and are contributing in the articulation of its actions, in the global scope and with the promotion of its agenda, facing the new challenges.

We are also pleased because this year, three countries of Latin America and the Caribbean region are chairing plenary sessions of the Conference on Disarmament. I wish success in this challenging work to Chile, Colombia and Cuba. Countries that are also very active in the sessions of the Council of OPANAL, and the first one is also a Member of the Council along with Bolivia, Guatemala, Brasil and Costa Rica. I acknowledge the leadership that all of them are printing to OPANAL and their active commitment to the nuclear disarmament cause.

Mister President,

One decade or more, seen in the long wave of disarmament history, can be relative. We hope that the second decade of the XXI Century, when we look back, would be the one of complete and general nuclear disarmament. Or at least, that can be the architect of the bridges that lead us in this worthy, legitimate and necessary aspiration.

Thank you.