



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

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**Commemoration of the 45th Anniversary of the Signing of the
Treaty of Tlatelolco**

Distinguished lecture

Amb. Sergio Duarte

High Representative for Disarmament Affairs
United Nations

“The importance of Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones
in the nuclear disarmament process”

Mexico City
14 February 2012

Opening Statement

**Commemoration of the 45th Anniversary of the Signing of
the Treaty of Tlatelolco**

By

Sergio Duarte

High Representative for Disarmament Affairs
United Nations



**International Seminar on “The Experience of the NWFZ of Latin America and the
Caribbean and the Perspective towards 2015 and Beyond”**

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I am deeply grateful for this opportunity to participate in this commemoration of the 45th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Tlatelolco. Speaking both as a citizen from this region, and as the United Nations High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, I view this treaty as one of the greatest achievements in the history of nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament efforts.

Its greatness is explained both in terms of the substance of the treaty, and the process that produced it.

In terms of process, the treaty was a product of enlightened policies and advocacy by individual governments, spearheaded by visionary leaders from particular states—most notably, Alfonso García Robles of Mexico, whose dedicated efforts on behalf of this treaty earned him the Nobel Peace Prize in 1982.

The treaty was also widely understood and welcomed by the general public. It was the product of an unprecedented level of cooperation among states at the regional level. And it benefited from encouragement and support from the world community, in particular at the United Nations.

The goal of establishing zones free of nuclear weapons has had a long history at the United Nations. In 1961, a year after the first French nuclear test, the General Assembly adopted Resolution 1652, which called upon Member States “to consider and respect the continent of Africa as a denuclearized zone.”

Then in 1962—just a few days after the Cuban Missile Crisis—Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, and Ecuador introduced a similar resolution concerning respect for “the territory of Latin America as a denuclearized zone”, as the goal was then called. While that resolution was not put to a vote, the General Assembly addressed this issue a year later by adopting Resolution 1911, which expressed the hope that states of the region will initiate studies aimed at achieving that goal, while also requesting the Secretary-General’s assistance. On 5 December 1967, the General Assembly responded to the signing of the Tlatelolco Treaty by adopting Resolution 2286, which welcomed the treaty “with special satisfaction”, adding that it “constitutes an event of historic significance.”

Secretary-General U Thant also addressed this issue in several of his written reports and statements. In his Annual Report on the work of the Organization in 1965, for example, he perceptively noted that the establishment of such a zone would have positive implications well outside the region—in his words, “It may well have a catalytic effect on other initiatives for denuclearization, for preventing the further spread of nuclear weapons, and for other measures of disarmament.” And in his statement at the first General Conference of OPANAL on 2 September 1969, he again predicted, “In a world that all too often seems dark and foreboding, the Treaty of Tlatelolco will shine as a beacon of light.”

There could be no better evidence of the truth of this prophecy than in the later negotiation of treaties establishing four regional nuclear-weapon-free zones around the world—in the South Pacific (1985), Southeast Asia (1995), Africa (1996), and Central Asia (2006). Today, fully 113 states belong to such zones, which includes virtually the entire Southern Hemisphere. In addition, the nuclear-weapon-free status of Mongolia has gained international recognition and other states have adopted legislation prohibiting such weapons.

Over the years, the world has witnessed another very welcome development—namely, the fact that States Parties of such regional treaties are increasingly recognizing that they collectively share a common identity—they are talking together, sharing insights about the roles and functions of such zones, and increasingly acting together to promote this prudent approach to regional and international peace and security. There have now been two major international conferences of members of nuclear-weapon-free zones. Participants have in a very real sense created a new category of states—in a world that is often viewed as divided between nuclear-weapon States and non-nuclear-weapon States, we now have a new category whose members can proudly declare their status as *nuclear-weapon-free States*. And while the world continues to worry about the dangers of additional states acquiring nuclear weapons, it is a fact that by far the greatest type of proliferation the world has witnessed since the signature of the Tlatelolco Treaty has been the proliferation of States belonging to nuclear-weapon-free zones.

And this auspicious type of proliferation has not yet stopped, as efforts are now underway to explore the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East, which will be the subject of a major international conference to be convened later this year by the UN Secretary-General along with the governments of the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Yet the progress that has been achieved worldwide in the years since the entry into force of the Tlatelolco Treaty must not blind us to certain realities, especially the fact that most of the world's population still today lives in countries that either have the bomb or rely upon various alliance commitments often called the “nuclear umbrella”.

Several states today continue to rely on the possession of nuclear weapons for their security. They still claim that such weapons are fully legal to use, that they are militarily effective in guaranteeing the national defence, that they offer an “insurance policy” against a dangerous and uncertain future, and even that they are a source of great power prestige and status. Even more disturbing, such states seem willing to use such weapons as they see fit. In addition, thousands remain on high-alert status, and doctrines still exist to use such weapons also against threats not involving nuclear weapons, and even to use them pre-emptively.

Meanwhile, vast resources are being allocated to efforts to “modernize” nuclear arsenals worldwide, with investments extending decades into the future—and there are still no signs of any negotiations (multilateral or bilateral) on nuclear disarmament per se, despite a legal commitment in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to undertake such negotiations in good faith. This is not to say there has been no progress in nuclear arms control, as best illustrated by the welcome entry into force this year of the New START treaty.

Since we are meeting today to commemorate an important event in the history of the Tlatelolco Treaty, I would like to draw attention not just to the process by which this treaty was negotiated and then replicated in various regions around the world, but also to the legacy of the substantive efforts originating in Latin America and the Caribbean to deal with the grave risks posed by the very existence of nuclear weapons.

We have all heard about the NPT's famous “three pillars”, which consist of nuclear disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation, and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. Today, these are widely (though not yet universally) recognized as the fundamental pillars of the

global nuclear non-proliferation regime—and it is very important to acknowledge that each of these pillars is viewed as part of an integrated whole, as they are mutually dependent and serve to reinforce each other. There is no intention that these three solemn goals of the NPT are to be pursued sequentially, as would be the case if nuclear non-proliferation were made a precondition for nuclear disarmament. The central idea behind that treaty is that these three goals must be pursued simultaneously—this is in accordance with the legal commitments of each State Party to the treaty, and longstanding expectations of the world community.

Yet these three commitments do not stem exclusively from the NPT. Together, they also comprise the very heart of the Tlatelolco Treaty, as seen both in its preamble and in the treaty's operative paragraphs. When the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 2286 in December 1967 welcoming the conclusion of the Tlatelolco Treaty, the preamble of that resolution stated that this treaty—and I now quote:

... will be a stimulus to the peaceful use of nuclear energy in the promotion of economic and social development and that it will act as a significant contribution towards preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons and as a powerful factor for general and complete disarmament.

Here we see, in this regional treaty, the three pillars of the NPT before it was even signed. This is all the more remarkable, given that the individual NPT proposals made in 1965 by the states with the largest nuclear arsenals—the Soviet Union and the United States—did not contain any references to either peaceful uses of nuclear energy or nuclear disarmament, and their joint draft of the NPT in 1967 made only brief references to these issues. The clear emphasis of those original drafts of the NPT was on preventing the horizontal proliferation of nuclear weapons to additional states, not the elimination of existing arsenals and the prevention of the vertical proliferation or qualitative improvement of those arsenals.

I believe that the signature of the Tlatelolco Treaty in 1967—with its carefully balanced integration of disarmament, non-proliferation, and peaceful uses—set the stage for the incorporation of these three pillars into the NPT. Clearly, the Tlatelolco Treaty did not seek merely to exclude nuclear weapons from Latin America and the Caribbean as an end in itself. It instead viewed this regional initiative as a step toward a world without nuclear weapons.

In addition, the Treaty broke new ground in establishing a positive legal undertaking in Article I of the Treaty for its States Parties “to use exclusively for peaceful purposes” the nuclear materials and facilities under their jurisdiction. Among its other innovations were its Protocols, which when ratified legally obliged the nuclear-weapon States to respect the zone, and efforts are continuing to encourage these states to remove the various reservations and provisos that they have attached to those commitments. In their Special Communiqué on the total elimination of nuclear weapons issued last December at the Summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, the Heads of State and Government of this region renewed their call for the removal of the reservations attached to those Protocols.

In retrospect, the Treaty has undoubtedly left an impressive legacy both with respect to the process by which it was negotiated—by gaining universal regional membership and then in serving as a model for additional zones in other regions—as well as with respect to the substantive content of the multilateral treaty to follow, the NPT. As we consider today

that 33 states in Latin America and the Caribbean are States Parties to the Tlatelolco Treaty; that 113 states belong to regional nuclear-weapon-free zones; and that 190 states have decided to join the NPT—making it second only to the UN Charter itself in approaching universal membership—we can see the true significance of all these efforts, both regional and global, to lead the world away from the horrors of nuclear war and toward the brighter horizon of a world entirely free of nuclear weapons.

This, I believe, is the true legacy of the Tlatelolco Treaty. And this is why the Member States and Secretariat of the United Nations have consistently supported this inspired regional effort, which serves the enlightened self-interests of all states. The treaty has been and remains very much the “beacon of light” described by Secretary-General U Thant, and I am honoured to join in this happy event today to commemorate the treaty’s 45th anniversary.