



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

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First Meeting of the States Parties to the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty

Statement by H.E. Ambassador Flavio Roberto Bonzanini

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and the Caribbean (OPANAL)

35 years of the Rarotonga Treaty – key developments, issues and opportunities

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear friends,

It is a great honor to participate, as an observer, and in my capacity as Secretary-General of the Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean (OPANAL) in this important gathering.

Allow me to start my intervention by congratulating all of you for the decision to convene the First Meeting of States Parties to the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty at a Ministerial level. It demonstrates not only the transcendence of this moment, but also the commitment of all States Parties to the Rarotonga Treaty to the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons.

Dear friends,

In Latin America and the Caribbean, we are aware of the relevance that represents the very first time in which states parties gather in order to take the decisions that will shape the future of the zone.

For instance, it should be noted that during the last session of the Preparatory Commission for the Denuclearization of Latin America (COPREDAL), in February 1967, there were 21 delegations of States from the region and 22 extra-regional States that participated as observers. This is relevant for two main reasons.

The first is that we can see the importance of starting with the negotiation of a treaty even when not all the parties that subsequently sign and ratify it accompany the process from the beginning. In the case of Tlatelolco, it achieved its universalization only in 2002 with the ratification of Cuba. This is a lesson learned that could serve as an example for other regions in which it is intended to create zones free of weapons of mass destruction.

On the other hand, it was important to have the participation of observers because this legitimized at the international level the transparent process under which the text of the

treaty was agreed. Likewise, this made it possible to involve from the beginning the six extra-regional States that would become Parties to the Additional Protocols to the Treaty of Tlatelolco.

Dear friends,

The Treaty of Tlatelolco, besides creating a new concept in the field of international security and an institution of international law -nuclear-weapon-free zones- has been effectively ensuring that its 33 States are free of nuclear weapons and opposing their existence elsewhere. It is therefore not surprising that we advocate worldwide for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons.

As my predecessor used to say: [...] *it would be meaningless for Latin America and the Caribbean to be satisfied in their shangrilah, napping under the shade of palm trees in the calm provided by the nuclear-weapon-free zone, pretending to ignore that the world is a whole ensemble and that today there are [...] thousands of nuclear weapons, most of them deployed.*"

The strengthening of the norm that establishes nuclear-weapon-free zones is one of the main priorities of OPANAL. In the last years, progressive communication and collaboration between representatives of the existing zones and Mongolia have significantly increased, and this meeting is a clear proof of that.

The existing five nuclear weapon free zones plus Mongolia form a very important constituency in international relations: more than 100 States that consider the mere existence of nuclear weapons as an existential threat to humankind. For this reason, the political capital represented by nuclear-weapon-free zones must be used to continue pursuing efforts to strengthen this norm.

Dear friends,

Additional Protocols to the treaties that establish nuclear-weapon-free zones are crucial for the perseverance and security of such zones.

Despite the fact that the Treaty of Tlatelolco is the only Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone treaty with the Additional Protocols which were signed and ratified by the Nuclear Weapon States, it still has been a point of concern of the OPANAL Member States: some of the

Nuclear Weapon States made interpretative declarations, which are in fact reservations, that limit their commitments.

Since 2016, OPANAL has been offering those States a way out of this problem, having proposed the signing of Adjustments which would eliminate misunderstandings and provide full respect of the Treaty. Nevertheless, we have not received any positive response.

In this regard, and keeping in mind that Additional Protocols of the Rarotonga Treaty have not been yet signed and ratified by all the five Nuclear Weapon States, we invite you to join our efforts in calling upon them to reconsider their approach and to carry out discussions in bona fide, with the aim to find a mutually agreed solution.

Protocols to other treaties establishing nuclear-weapon-free zones have also been subject to reservations. Nuclear-Weapon States should be open to reconsider the scope of their reservations in agreement with the States belonging to nuclear-weapon-free zones.

Dear friends,

OPANAL is more than glad to offer its experience and expertise of more than five decades in the issues of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. For this reason, I would like to enumerate some areas in which we can advance the cooperation between our two regions. Some practical next steps could include:

1. The revitalization of the 2003 Cooperation Agreement between OPANAL and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
2. The promotion of greater coordination and preparation for international meetings and conferences
3. The possibility of issuing joint statements and resolutions on matters of common interest, and
4. The possibility to provide assistance and cooperation for the institutional and procedural development of the Consultative Committee

Today, the *raison d'être* of the nuclear-weapon-free zones transcends their role as vast areas of peace. They should evolve until they fulfil their purpose, forming bridges in the complex architecture of global nuclear disarmament, which is now more challenging than ever, and it is towards that goal that efforts must be directed. The new Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons that will enter into force in January 2021 offers a wide

range of possibilities, including victim assistance and environmental remediation which are both issues of great interest for the South Pacific.

Dear friends,

Let me conclude my intervention by stressing that we hope this meeting will trigger a renewed and sustained cooperation, not only between our two regions, but also with the other nuclear weapon free zones.

I am delighted to have had the opportunity, at least virtually due to the ongoing pandemic, to share with you our perspective from Latin America and the Caribbean.

I thank you all for your attention.