



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

***A world free of nuclear weapons:
is it desirable? is it possible?
how could it be achieved?***

International Seminar organized by the
Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and
the Caribbean (OPANAL)¹

Mexico City
13 February 2017

Foreword

Ambassador Luiz Filipe de Macedo Soares

Secretary-General of the Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the
Caribbean – OPANAL

The 50th Anniversary of the Treaty of Tlatelolco was institutionally commemorated in the XXV Session of the General Conference of OPANAL – the Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean in Mexico City on February 14th 2017. The day before, an international Seminar took place in the very location where negotiations of the Treaty were held, in 1967, in the headquarters of the Inter-American Conference on Social Security in San Jerónimo Lídice, a pleasant neighbourhood of Mexico City.

Similar intellectual gatherings had been organised in previous landmark commemorations of the Treaty of Tlatelolco. This time; however, the emphasis was not on the Treaty itself or the novelty it introduced in International Law, namely the nuclear-weapon-free zone. The focus this time was on the current situation of the international debate and political trends regarding nuclear weapons.

¹ The publication of the International Seminar is available at OPANAL's web page:
http://www.opanal.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/OPANAL_Seminar_2017.pdf

The region of the Caribbean and Latin America has been scarcely exposed to such debate. Experts, think-tanks and civil society organizations specialized in this field are relatively rare in the region. For that reason, it was avoided the format of a meeting reserved to academic circles, a further exploration of this sinister field of international relations and strategic studies, conducted in the opaque jargon developed over 70 years since man invented a tool for the world's instant destruction.

In any case, we needed a high level and varied participation. This was certainly achieved. We had twelve speakers from twelve different countries – three from Latin America and the Caribbean, four from Asia, four from Europe and one from the United States. We were sorry no panellists from Africa and the Southern Pacific were able to participate.

The title we gave to this meeting deliberately pointed to the amplex we intended and to the divergences and perplexities that surround the consideration of nuclear weapons and their possible suppression. Three questions were put before the panellists and the audience: A world without nuclear weapons – (i) is it desirable? some say nay; (ii) is it possible? many say aye; (iii) how can it be achieved? An arduous and worthwhile question. A sizeable majority of States are convinced that nuclear weapons have to be prohibited and then eliminated while a minority express that the present political – thence strategic – situation makes nuclear weapons necessary. In other words, they maintain that, for the time being at least, a world without nuclear weapons is not desirable. Nonetheless, this last group believes that a variety of measures could be taken paving the way to an eventual end of those weapons. This is a hard and urgent controversy. Hard for the implied heights of power involved; urgent because, among other aspects, of the current instability in international relations.

The Seminar was organized in two consecutive panels covering a whole day. The first panel considered the conditions of power and danger and the perceptions of security in the world we live in. The second panel discussed the measures that should be taken to get out of the “nuclear brink” – to borrow from the title of William J. Perry's recent book. In order to further orient the debate but allowing participants to address the issues freely, a number of questions were proposed to each of the two panels. All this can be found in the program of the Seminar reproduced in this volume.

The interventions included mentions to the forthcoming United Nations Conference to negotiate a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination which took place just afterwards in two sessions (March and June-July 2017), concluding by the adoption of a Treaty. Thus, the Seminar reflected the different shades of thinking prevailing on the eve of such momentous negotiation.

We counted on two marvellous moderators for the panels. The first, Sergio González Gálvez, Ambassador Emeritus of Mexico, was the closest collaborator of Ambassador Alfonso García Robles, the chairman of the negotiations of the Treaty of Tlatelolco, before, during and after those negotiations. He embodies the conditions of eyewitness to History and profound knowledge of the subject. The moderator in the second panel was Ms Beatrice Fihn, of Sweden, the leader of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons – ICAN, the largest coalition of civil society organizations in the field.

The presentations of the panellists were concise and inevitably contain references and terms not easily understood by readers less familiar with the subject-matter. We added footnotes to help the understanding of such terms.

The audience, numbering some 200 people included diplomats, journalists, scholars, university students from the region as well as budding Mexican diplomats. The audiences' interventions are also transcribed as recorded and the transcription does not engage the participants, not having been revised by them.

Dr William J. Perry was the keynote speaker in the first panel. The 19th Secretary of Defense of the United States, having had a lifelong career in the field of nuclear engineering, no one can more properly be called an insider in the field of nuclear weapons. He knows first-hand the realities, the problems, the motivations and the dangers. His thrilling talk was about current realities, not only on past experiences, and he explained why he transitioned from being a cold warrior to taking up the hard mission of raising awareness and educating the public on the grave dangers posed by nuclear weapons.

Dr Kim Won-soo, of the Republic of Korea, then Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs in the United Nations, brought the privileged perspective of someone who observes the whole gamut of sensibilities and consequent positions that interact in the multilateral debates and how decisions can emerge. His lecture was important to demonstrate, before entering into the different aspects of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, how the players, being States or not, can progress to a common goal.

We dive deeper in the arcane world of security and insecurity by the hand of Lord Desmond Browne, also an insider, having been Secretary of State for Defence of the United Kingdom. He shows, for example, that the periodic meetings of the original nuclear weapons possessors (United States, Russia, United Kingdom, France and China) do little to provide better security conditions for the world at large, rather they reinforce their supremacy. He warns about the impending nightmare of cyber-threat which adds new dimensions to the nuclear weapons modernisation now in course.

From these descriptions, we come to the situation where the international community finds itself within the mechanisms that were supposed to bring the nuclear danger to control. A former High Representative for Disarmament Affairs of the United Nations, the German scholar Angela Kane, adds substance and necessary contours to the nuclear weapons challenge and to the necessary responses.

A serious discussion cannot be confined to like-minded and Ambassador D.B. Venkatesh Varma, of India, who has had a long career as his country's representative in disarmament fora and negotiations, brings a sophisticated point of view on how to strengthen international security. He defends the so-called step-by-step approach to reach a world without nuclear weapons against the idea of a nuclear ban treaty.

The morning session ends with a lively discussion in which the Chinese point-of-view is highlighted by Ambassador Wang Qun, Director General of the Department of Arms Control in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China.

The debate was triggered by Mr Rodolfo Wachsman a keen Mexican observer of international affairs, introducing two momentous questions: the Iran agreement and of the North Korean nuclear program. A second exchange focused on the nature and value of nuclear-weapon-free zones. Finally, there was an in-depth discussion on the use of nuclear weapons and the humanitarian consequences of it.

The keynote speaker opening the afternoon panel is someone that can most properly be called an "old-hand" in disarmament affairs, with a long experience as a negotiator representing his country, Sri Lanka, as United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs and presently as President of the think-tank Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs. His lecture fits perfectly well with the aim of this panel about what is to be done. It is a condensed but very complete account of the developments in the last fifty years or so. A lot was intended and tried; nothing or almost nothing came out. In spite of this, Dr Jayantha Dhanapala does not leave us with a sensation of discouragement.

Ambassador José Luis Cancela, Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs of Uruguay and former Chairman of the First Committee – Disarmament and International Security – of the United Nations General Assembly, presented a very useful overview of the legal architecture of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, since the first UN General Assembly in 1946. Specially instigating are his comments on the possible characterization of the use of nuclear weapons as a crime against humanity and a crime of war. This is an important current discussion.

There is widespread agreement that the recent steps forward in the direction of nuclear disarmament sprang from the three conferences in 2013-2014 on the humanitarian consequences of the possible use of such weapons. This is the main theme of the presentation by Ambassador Alexander Kmentt of Austria, who played a decisive role in that process.

Those interested in knowing about the processes that led to the recent adoption of the ban treaty must read Ambassador of Thailand Thani Thongphakdi's account of the Open-ended Working Group ably chaired by him, which met in 2016 and was essential to the convening by the United Nations General Assembly of the Conference to negotiate the Treaty banning nuclear weapons. His presentation shows how much our Seminar was up-to-date.

No intervention could be more appropriate to close the Seminar than Ms Shorna-Kay Richards', Former Deputy Permanent Representative of Jamaica to the United Nations. She paints a *vol-d'oiseau* picture of the present situation with a focus on the Caribbean and Latin American region. She closes by pointing out people as the alpha-omega of all our efforts.

Although Tlatelolco, OPANAL and the zones free of nuclear weapons were not the focus of the international Seminar, we happily note that the participants, starting with Dr William J. Perry, made important considerations about this institute of International Law conceived fifty years ago. That's why we insert at the end of this volume a text that aims at exploring the legal and political nature of a nuclear-weapons-free zone.

The Seminar was made possible by the collaboration of many people and it is appropriate to list their names in the final pages.