

## **The day the world changed**

By Luiz Filipe de Macedo Soares

Secretary-General of the Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean (OPANAL) <sup>1</sup>

On Monday, July 16, 1945, at 5:30a.m., the world changed completely.

In Alamogordo, New Mexico, 86 miles from the Mexican border, the first atomic bomb in History blasted.

Conducted just before the end of World War II, the “Trinity Test” released energy equivalent to 20 kilotons of TNT, that is to say, 2 thousand times more than the most powerful bombs dropped in Europe during the War.

In WW II, as in any other war, either previous or subsequent, the strongest side does not necessarily win. It may happen, as it has happened repeatedly, that the underdog with more courage and creativity ends up as the winner; just as it happened in Vietnam. The new weapon assured absolute power to win in just one shot, as Dr No and others had dreamed of.

The destructive power released 70 years ago had no precedents. This was demonstrated at Hiroshima and Nagasaki three weeks later, on 6 and 9 August 1945.

The quest for such power led the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, France, China, Israel, India, Pakistan, and finally North Korea to acquire their nuclear arsenals. Between 1945 and 2013, these countries conducted more than 2 thousand nuclear explosions, the environmental and social repercussions of which are still to be measured.

Nowadays, there are about 16 thousand nuclear weapons with a total explosive power equivalent to more than 6 billion tons of TNT; that is nearly a ton per human being. More than 90% of these weapons are held by the United States and Russia.

The world changed dramatically because the nuclear-weapon States acquired an incomparable power of coercion. More than means to wage war, nuclear weapons are instruments of political imposition thwarting international relations.

Nuclear weapons place States that possess them in a superior category of that of those not having them. Some countries prefer to shelter under the “umbrella” provided by these weapons by means of military alliances with nuclear powers, as in the case of NATO. The vast majority, including all countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, do not accept that such capacity for instant global annihilation conveys respectability and legitimacy.

Inequalities among nations always existed. International relations aim at preventing that inequalities become oppression. The nuclear weapon promotes a radical inequality. It is a gun pointing at the head of Mankind.

---

<sup>1</sup> The views expressed in this article are the sole responsibility of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of OPANAL Member States.