

Statement of Mr. Charles Fernández, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Commerce of Antigua and Barbuda for the XXV Regular Session of the General Ministerial Conference of the Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean (OPANAL)

Madame President,
Vice Presidents,
Secretary General of OPANAL,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen;
Good Afternoon!

It is a distinct pleasure for me to be here in Mexico City to address the members of OPANAL on the occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the signing of the Tlatelolco Treaty. As we celebrate this historic milestone, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Government of Mexico, and the OPANAL Secretariat for organizing this important event and for the excellent hospitality afforded to us!

This year, we, the members of OPANAL, have much to be proud of. Five decades ago, the Tlatelolco Treaty was drafted and opened for signature in response to the panic generated by the Cuban Missile Crisis and the nuclear arms race. Since then, thirty-three (33) Latin American and Caribbean nations have signed and ratified the treaty, creating the world's first nuclear-weapons-free-zone (NWFZ) in a highly-populated area.

Our convening here today in Mexico City serves a meaningful reminder of our commitment towards today the vision of a nuclear weapons-free world. Not only has the Tlatelolco Treaty helped to eliminate the threat of a nuclear-arms race in the Latin American and Caribbean, contributing towards peace and security in the region; it has also set a precedent for global non-proliferation and disarmament regimes, and has inspired subsequent nuclear-weapon-free-zone agreements.

Antigua and Barbuda signed the Treaty of Tlatelolco on the 11th of October, 1983. As far as Antigua and Barbuda is concerned, nuclear weapons pose the single biggest threat to sustainable development. A nuclear war would result in death and devastation in the most contaminated and damaged regions, but would also have far-reaching ramifications for Non-Nuclear Weapons States – countries that are not even involved in the nuclear arms race, and even vehemently opposed to it.

Aside from the threats posed to human health, a nuclear weapons conflict would have devastating, long-lasting effects on the environment, as radioactive fallout does not recognize international borders. Worldwide effects could include adverse changes in the global climate, as well as the destruction of the ozone layer.

As a Small and Vulnerable Economy (SVE), Antigua and Barbuda is especially vulnerable to economic uncertainties and external shocks. Today, the world is more interdependent and interconnected than it was 50 years ago. The dilution of global security as a result of a nuclear dispute would not only hamper growth and investment. It would threaten to undermine all of the progress achieved towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), including the goal of poverty reduction.

We have been told that nuclear weapons can deter adversaries, guarantee the defence of a nation-state and its allies, and enhance security. However, the continuation of the nuclear arms race actually engenders the possibility of nuclear war in the first place. The devastating consequences that nuclear weapons hold for humanity, as well as for life on earth, point to their genocidal nature: they constitute a lose-lose situation for mankind.

At this particular moment in history, the world has become increasingly volatile. Nuclear weapons are spreading to more nations, and terrorist groups are utilising increasingly sophisticated technology. Effective multilateralism has become more important than ever.

It is the first time the doomsday clock has moved so close to global disaster “2^{1/2} minutes to midnight” since 1953 with the hydrogen bomb tests!

As members of OPANAL, we have already made our contribution to international peace, stability and security. However, we must continue to progress with our excellent work, and strive to ensure that nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament remain high on international agendas. I look forward to a fruitful session, and wish to assure you all of Antigua and Barbuda’s commitment to working with OPANAL to ensure a safer world for present and future generations.

Finally, as we celebrate 50 years today Valentine’s Day the greatest love that can be given to the people of this world is to prohibit nuclear weapons worldwide.

Thank you.