

50th Anniversary of the Treaty for the Proscription of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean (Treaty of Tlatelolco)

Secretary-General and UN Remarks

Delivered by Mr KIM Won-soo, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs

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Her Excellency, Susana Malcorra, Madame Acting President

Ambassador Soares, Secretary-General of OPANAL

Ministers, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a privilege for me to represent the United Nations at this landmark event. At the outset, I bring you the best wishes of Secretary-General Guterres. Less than a month ago at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, Secretary-General Guterres said he is resolved to actively pursue the abolition of all weapons of mass destruction and the strict regulation of conventional weapons. He has stressed his steadfast commitment to achieving a nuclear weapon-free world. He therefore welcomes the convening of this important event.

The nuclear weapon-free zone in Latin America and the Caribbean was a founding element of global efforts to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons. The Secretary-General congratulates and thanks the Government of Mexico for hosting this event to remind us of the historical importance of the Treaty of Tlatelolco. He also thanks all thirty-three States parties for their commitment to the Treaty and to nuclear disarmament.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Today's event is an important and timely milestone. We have the opportunity to celebrate the Treaty's extraordinary legacy but also to recall why in these uncertain times it remains so relevant.

First, the legacy. Through its artful balancing of disarmament, non-proliferation and the peaceful use of nuclear energy, Tlatelolco set a high bar, not just for the nuclear weapon-free zones that followed, but also for the disarmament and non-proliferation regime, including the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, negotiated one year later.

Tlatelolco has tangibly bolstered the cause of disarmament in three ways. First, it prevented the entire region of Latin America and the Caribbean from becoming part of the Cold War nuclear competition. Second, it stopped the spread of nuclear weapons to this region, thus preventing any further complication for global disarmament negotiations. Third, it established the first legally-binding assurances by the nuclear-weapon states, constraining their nuclear doctrines and the scope of any possible nuclear war in the region.

The treaty set off a chain reaction of nuclear weapon-free zones treaties in the South Pacific, Southeast Asia, Africa and Central Asia. Together with the Antarctic Treaty and the nuclear-free status of Mongolia, nuclear weapon-free zones now cover one hundred and thirteen countries across 81 million square kilometres of territory. The territory of the entire Southern Hemisphere is effectively a nuclear weapon-free zone, covering around eight hundred million people, 100% of the population, while approximately 1.3 billion people in the Northern Hemisphere, only about 20% of the population, belong to such zones.

All of this stems from the foresight and commitment showed fifty years ago by the States represented here.

But there is also more work to be done. The most pressing issue is the long-overdue Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction. I am hopeful that the commencement of the 2020 NPT review process will be an opportunity to make a game-changing contribution to regional and global security.

Second, the enduring importance of this treaty. Two of the keys to Tlatelolco's success are its flexibility and inclusiveness. Both are needed more than ever in our fractured international climate.

There are many paths to nuclear disarmament, but they all require us to work together. Those States possessing nuclear weapons need to be held to their commitments to disarmament. All States have a role in finding the way forward. Ultimately, we will only reach our goal through flexible and inclusive engagement.

States parties to Tlatelolco should follow in the steps of Nobel Prize winner Alfonso Garcia Robles and the other visionaries who negotiated this treaty. I count on States parties to use out of the box thinking to bridge the gaps between the nuclear haves and have-nots.

For fifty years, this treaty has been, in the words of former Secretary-General U Thant, "a beacon of light". May its light continue to shine until we have achieved a world, safer and more secure, without nuclear weapons, in both this region and beyond, and better for all.

I thank you so much.

Muchas gracias.