



OPANAL
Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean

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Report of the Secretary-General

Thank you very much, Mr. President.

In my capacity as Secretary-General of the Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean (OPANAL), it is a great honour to address the Twenty-Eighth Session of the General Conference for the first time.

Let me begin by expressing my sincere thanks to Guatemala for its generous hospitality in hosting this historic XXVIII Session of the General Conference of OPANAL. This meeting marks an important milestone, as it is the first time in a decade that this conference is being held in the capital of a Member State, other than the host State, which demonstrates our region's commitment and collaboration in promoting nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

I would also like to highlight and acknowledge the unwavering support of His Excellency Ambassador Mario Alberto Búcaro Flores, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Guatemala, who not only displays exemplary leadership, but is also a close friend and a firm promoter of OPANAL's objectives and philosophy.

Before reviewing the report in its entirety, I would like to express my sincere thanks to the 33 Member States of OPANAL. The active and constructive participation of all its representatives throughout this challenging year has been fundamental. Together, we have not only faced significant challenges, but also identified valuable opportunities that will enable us to move forward with determination toward our common goal: the total eradication of nuclear weapons.

Distinguished delegates,

In compliance with Article 11.4 of the Treaty of Tlatelolco, I have the honour to present this report to this XXVIII Session of the General Conference, which details the most relevant activities carried out by the OPANAL Secretariat over the past year.

Professionalization of the Secretariat: In recent years, it has been the prerogative of the current Secretary-General to promote the strengthening and professionalization of the OPANAL Secretariat. Today, I can affirm that we have made considerable progress towards the consolidation of an organization of the highest quality and efficiency, the foundations of which are based on the constant professionalization of those who make up the OPANAL Secretariat. The highly specialized profiles of the professional cadre of officers stand out for their continuous commitment to growth and training. Far from remaining static, these profiles are constantly evolving, adapting to a world in constant transformation and rising to the challenges that the areas of the Treaty of Tlatelolco and the mandate of the Secretariat currently face. The professionalization of the OPANAL Secretariat emerges as an essential pillar to ensure the success of the Agency's activities and to support Member States in fulfilling their obligations and strengthening the Treaty of Tlatelolco.

Budget administration and financial situation of OPANAL: It is imperative to recognize the context that many countries in the region are currently facing, which is marked by budgetary challenges that have repercussions in different areas, including our Agency. Aware of this adverse situation, OPANAL has been compelled to take the difficult decision to reduce its staff by 25% in the last two years. Therefore, it is essential to understand that certain activities cannot be analyzed without considering this context. However, and despite all the limitations, the Secretariat has made an effort to prioritize, since the end of the health situation that prevailed until mid-2022, an effective insertion of OPANAL in the international arena, in line with the requests made by various representations at that time. This commitment has been reflected in the Secretariat's active international presence, as evidenced by its outstanding participation in numerous international events over the past two years. These efforts have been essential to strengthen OPANAL's projection in multilateral forums, despite the budgetary and operational constraints we have faced.

Status of ratifications of amendments to the Treaty of Tlatelolco: The improvement and strengthening of the Treaty of Tlatelolco is an issue of great importance. This Treaty constitutes a fundamental pillar of the international non-proliferation and disarmament regime, but like any agreement, it has challenges that must be addressed in order to ensure its effectiveness. In line with the Secretary-General's vision of inclusiveness and considering the treaty as an ever-evolving living instrument, we must take action to address these challenges. I therefore call on Member States to once again demonstrate their commitment and cooperation to strengthen this key instrument and to achieve ratifications of the pending amendments to the Treaty. On this issue, the Council could create some ad hoc mechanism to allow these States to identify support and assistance measures to complete their ratification processes.

Control System: Regarding the Control System, which constitutes the backbone of the Treaty of Tlatelolco, in particular Article 14, it stands out as a pioneering system in the field of verification through formal declarations submitted by each Member State to guarantee the absence of activities that contravene the Treaty in their respective territories. Compliance with Article 14 was of vital importance, since without it there could be no certainty that the Treaty was being fully respected. The biannual periodicity of Article 14 makes sense, not only politically and legally, but also practically. Full observance of the Treaty of Tlatelolco is important not only for its States Parties, but also for the entire international community. In that regard, since the adoption of the optional format presented by the Secretariat at the XXVI Special Session of the General Conference on 15 November 2018, through its resolution CG/E/Res.02/2018, as well as the Secretariat's continued efforts to support membership in this regard, we have been pleased to see an increase in reporting in accordance with this important obligation of States Parties. However, full compliance with the Control System applied in accordance with the provisions of Articles 13 to 17 of the Treaty of Tlatelolco is the reason for this transparency and confidence-building mechanism.

Interpretative Declarations to Protocols I and II to the Treaty of Tlatelolco: The issue of interpretative declarations has made notable progress in the past year. It is important to note that this progress has been achieved to a large extent due to the deep interest and high degree of commitment not only of the Member States of the Council, which have fulfilled the mandate conferred by the last General Conference, but also of all Member States that have contributed significantly to the definition of strategies for both virtual and face-to-face meetings with each of the States Parties to the Protocols I and II that issued these declarations at the time of their signature and/or ratification. The mechanisms of dialogue with the United States, France, the United Kingdom, and Russia are the first step towards consolidating an open, frank, and constructive communication process. This will enable us to reach mutual understanding and, more importantly, to find a pragmatic and lasting solution that allows for unconditional negative security guarantees. For that reason, and in line with what was stated in the Council's report on this subject, I would like to reiterate my full support for the Council to continue to work diligently and to make further progress on this highly important issue.

Relations with other Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones: The regime created by treaties establishing nuclear-weapon-free zones in densely populated areas of the planet has contributed not only to international peace and security, but also to the development and codification of international law. For this reason, as pioneers, the Treaty of Tlatelolco and OPANAL have an inescapable responsibility to strengthen cooperation and exchange of information, as well as to support the creation of other nuclear-weapon-free zones. In this regard, in recent years OPANAL has worked to

establish direct contact with the agencies and countries responsible for nuclear-weapon-free zones and to strengthen cooperation with them. The Secretariat has contributed to the work of the Working Group on the Establishment of the Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Middle East. In addition, the Member States of OPANAL have discussed and agreed on a draft resolution that instructs the Secretary-General of the United Nations to prepare a new comprehensive study of the question of nuclear-weapon-free zones in all their aspects, to be submitted to the 79th General Assembly. The issue of the Fourth Conference on Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones and Mongolia remains an unfinished business, so it is important to explore options and analyze possible strategies to support its holding in 2026, prior to the eleventh NPT Review Conference. A step in this direction would be for Member States to consider taking over coordination and convening the Fourth Conference of Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones and Mongolia.

OPANAL's Headquarters: Another aspect of great relevance, which has received the continuous attention of Member States, is the lack of a permanent headquarters for the Agency. Over time, the Secretariat has maintained a consistent focus on this issue. Although OPANAL's headquarters were moved to more spacious facilities in 2015, this measure does not address the fundamental issue, as the Agency continues to rely on a lease, raising long-term security and sustainability concerns. Reliance on a lease is not appropriate for an international organization, which requires a permanent, independent, visible headquarters with the necessary space for its proper functioning. The lack of a permanent headquarters raises political and practical concerns for Member States. It is inappropriate for an intergovernmental body to lack a permanent headquarters and be subject to the possibility of eviction. Despite the support provided by the host State and depositary of the Treaty, which had contributed generously to the financial viability of the Agency, it was the responsibility of Member States to join efforts to address this issue. The absence of a permanent headquarters poses not only practical problems, but also has political implications that need to be resolved jointly.

Disarmament and non-proliferation education: The training of new generations of experts and highly trained cadres in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons is the responsibility of all OPANAL Member States. That is why OPANAL's course, which provides elementary training, is one of the flagship programs in the field of education, which is available to States that request it. In addition, the Summer School for Diplomats of Latin America and the Caribbean has established itself as the most comprehensive specialized program, which is the product of close collaboration between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mexico, the Matías Romero Institute, the James Martin Center for Non-Proliferation Studies, and OPANAL. I would like to thank

Minister Mario Búcaro for his support for the celebration of the VI Edition of the OPANAL Course, last July, in Guatemala City. I also thank the Government of Ecuador, which will host the OPANAL course in December, and Mexico, in January 2024. I also invite all Member States to submit candidates to participate in the Summer School on Nuclear Disarmament and Non-Proliferation, which will commemorate its tenth anniversary in 2024.

Gender: As you may recall, at the XXVII Session of the General Conference held on 30 September 2021, a significant event took place with the adoption for the first time of resolution CG/Res.05/2021 entitled "Gender, Non-Proliferation and Disarmament". This resolution, submitted by the Secretariat, strongly recognized the invaluable contribution of women in the promotion of disarmament, non-proliferation, and arms control, particularly in the field of nuclear weapons, as well as in the promotion of peace. These issues have been under consideration by other international bodies over a period spanning more than two decades. The consecutive approval of this resolution for three years would formalize the recognition of the invaluable contribution of women in the Latin American and Caribbean region from the highest level of OPANAL, and its influence would extend to the other organs of our Agency. This recognition further consolidates the critical role of women in promoting peace and security at the international level.

Priorities for 2024

On this last point, I would like to refer to some of the priorities that OPANAL has ahead of it in 2024, including its participation in relevant meetings such as the Second Preparatory Committee for the Eleventh NPT Review Conference in Geneva and the Third Meeting of States Parties to the TPNW, which will be chaired by Kazakhstan. In the case of the NPT preparatory process, the Secretariat will support the Council in advancing the dialogue with the States Parties to Additional Protocols I and II.

In addition, the Secretariat will continue to support the Technical Working Group, under the coordination of Brazil, to promote, with the support of Member States, a second comprehensive study on nuclear-weapon-free zones within the framework of the First Committee of the 79th General Assembly of the United Nations. Similarly, the Secretariat will advance the negotiations of the Memorandum of Understanding with the Central Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone and the dialogue with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, in order to exchange good practices and lessons learned, and to enable us to conclude a Memorandum of Understanding in the near future. The Secretariat will also seek to reach out to Mongolia to explore possible areas of cooperation.

The Treaty of Tlatelolco is one of the foundational elements of the nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament regime. Its importance cannot be underestimated, and we must do everything in our power to ensure that it remains relevant and effective in the times to come.

Thank you for your attention.