



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

General Conference

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Report of the Secretary-General

Fifty-four years ago, in 1963, the Representatives of Brazil and Mexico, Josué Castro and Luis Padilla Nervo, respectively, presented to the Eighteen Nations Disarmament Committee (ENDC) the “Declaration on the denuclearization of Latin America”, issued by the Presidents of Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador and Mexico. This was one of the first expressions leading to the negotiation of the Treaty of Tlatelolco, half a century ago. Today, we are gathered in this magnificent room that bears the name of Luis Padilla Nervo.

I wish to reiterate my appreciation to Member States for the support and confidence extended to me and to OPANAL over the last four years of my tenure as Secretary-General. Such confidence and support have been fully expressed in my re-election for the 2018-2021 term, an honour given to me by Member States at the XXV Session of the General Conference of OPANAL, held on 14 February 2017.

In the annual assessment of the Secretariat of OPANAL, the central focus in 2017 was the commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Treaty of Tlatelolco, which was certainly a successful commemoration for a number of reasons. The main event was the General Conference, which was opened by the President of the United States of Mexico, with the participation of Ministers and Vice-Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Member States. Moreover, this Session was also being attended by representatives from the international community, including the States Party to the Additional Protocols to the Treaty of Tlatelolco, delegations from other Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones, States from different regions, international organizations and civil society organizations.

The commemoration had repercussions at the United Nations with special events in New York and Vienna. In addition, the commemoration contributed to the ongoing reflection on nuclear weapons through the International Seminar organized by OPANAL on 13 February 2017. The Seminar gathered high-level participants and the debates represent a significant contribution, which may influence international discussions on the matter. The publication containing the Seminar presentations and debates will be launched next week and distributed worldwide, hence the 50th Anniversary of the Treaty of Tlatelolco has not only been commemorated within the Region, but rather an event of global impact.

The functions of OPANAL are clearly established in the Treaty of Tlatelolco. The Agency finds its legitimacy and its inspiration in the Treaty. Inspiration because the Treaty is a legal instrument that not only poses a legal framework but also reflects the thinking and objectives of the Region on the subject matter of the Treaty. From the beginning of his tenure in 2014, this Secretary-General has sought to ensure that the Agency provides Member States with the services commanded and inspired by the Treaty.

The Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in Latin America and the Caribbean has been consolidated for at least 15 years. Such consolidation, however, does not imply petrification, as there is always work to be done in order to guarantee compliance with the Treaty and to project the Treaty ideals towards the international community.

Today, the region of Latin America and the Caribbean has an extremely active participation in the international debate and initiatives on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation bigger in proportion to its geographical, economic, demographic and other dimensions. OPANAL has proved to be an important support to this participation.

In addition to the Communiqué on the nuclear test conducted by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on 3 September 2017, OPANAL Member States issued this year two comprehensive declarations on nuclear weapons: the first one on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the Treaty of Tlatelolco (14 February 2017) and the second one on the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons (26 September 2017). It is worth noting that, possibly, no other region issues so extensive and encompassing declarations, reached by consensus, on the issue of nuclear weapons.

This expression of positions was also put into practice at the sessions of the “United Nations Conference to negotiate a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination” in March and June/July 2017. This process concluded on 20 September 2017 with the opening for signature of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. There is no denying that the Caribbean and Latin America have been key actors in this historic achievement.

The Treaty is a great achievement in the path towards the elimination of nuclear weapons. Thus far, 53 States have signed this Treaty, out of which 16 are Caribbean and Latin American States. Experts have criticized technical elements contained in the text of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Nuclear-weapons possessors and their allies made strong and blatant pressure against the negotiation of the Treaty. However, what needs to be emphasized is that by prohibiting nuclear weapons, a legal instrument, for the first time, establishes an international norm that makes these weapons illegal. In addition to the preponderant participation of the Member States of OPANAL, the Secretariat has sought to contribute, within the limits of its competence, to this major step forward.

Despite the political and legal progress made, as mentioned above, according to SIPRI¹ data, there are still 14,935 nuclear weapons in the possession of 9 States. All member States, whose flags are in this room, are convinced that the sole existence of those weapons endangers the survival of humanity. But the situation is exacerbated by nuclear tests and by serious and pressing threats exchanged between nuclear-weapon possessors.

¹ SIPRI Yearbook 2017 available at <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2017-09/yb17-summary-eng.pdf>

In 2017, the Secretariat, under the guidance and support of the Council, continued to implement the decisions adopted by the General Conference in 2014, 2015 and 2016. As provided for by the Treaty in Article 10, the Council presents to the General Conference its report, Document C/14/2017, which describes the activities undertaken and decisions made in 2017. The General Conference, after examining the activities described in the report of the Council, will adopt the decisions reflected in the draft resolutions submitted to this Special Session.

On this occasion, I would like to emphasize the activities on education, which are of special interest to Member States. We have been able to continue to implement the internship programme sponsored by the Netherlands. The Secretariat welcomed an intern from Saint Lucia for the first half of the year, and an intern from Haiti for the second half. Unfortunately, it was not possible to welcome interns from Member States from Latin America, which are not covered by the financial support from the Netherlands. This opportunity, however, is always available. Moreover, we await the implementation of the first course of OPANAL, to take place on 11-15 December 2017, in Montevideo, Uruguay.

We are still concerned over the involvement of Caribbean Member States in the activities of OPANAL. We continue, therefore, to implement actions to promote a greater engagement by Caribbean Member States. Although practical difficulties cannot be ignored, we will continue to explore all possible opportunities, including the participation of the Secretary-General in a high-level meeting of CARICOM in order to make a presentation on the Treaty of Tlatelolco and the Agency.

In the financial front, I wish to mention that the Council is submitting to the General Conference the third consecutive Budget and Scale of Assessments with a zero-growth policy.

This is the fourth report that I submit to Member States and it is up to them, fundamentally, to confirm whether the Agency made progress in complying with the Treaty of Tlatelolco and in performing its duties. With the risk of appearing presumptuous, I can only reply positively to the question. Without a doubt, there is room for improvement and it is also possible to expand the activities of the Agency, and hence those of the Region, on the matters addressed by OPANAL. We will continue to attempt to develop new activities and to seek ways to tackle situations and circumstances that may emerge.

To conclude, in November 2016, in the most north-western part of Latin America and the Caribbean, OPANAL participated in the unveiling of a commemorative plaque for the 50th Anniversary of the Treaty of Tlatelolco that reads as follows:

“Here in Tijuana, the most north-western municipality of all Latin America, begins the Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone of Latin America and the Caribbean, which extends to the farthest southern extreme of the Continent. As established by the Treaty of Tlatelolco in 1967, within this 80-million-square-kilometre region there are no nuclear weapons nor will there ever be”.