



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

General Conference

XXVIII Session
3 November 2023
Agenda item 6

Original: Spanish

Courtesy translation

Statement by Guatemala

Mr. President,

Mr. Secretary-General,

Dear Delegates,

Thank you very much for giving me the floor.

At this very moment in which we are gathered, different parts of the world are facing moments full of complex challenges, in which peace and security, as fundamental pillars for the full development of our nations, are in danger, debating between the polarization of ideas, the imposition of interests and the consequent breakdown of trust between powers and between peoples. In many cases, peaceful coexistence is interrupted, and human rights are violated at the mercy of an incessant struggle to establish spheres of influence and domination.

That is why, today more than ever, we must unite and continue working on actions that allow us to find clear strategies that pave the way to a safer and more peaceful world for generations to come.

The history of Latin America and the Caribbean is marked by a strong determination to promote peace and mutual cooperation. In this regard, the Treaty of Tlatelolco, signed more than half a century ago, was a milestone and a historic step towards the path of nuclear non-proliferation and global stability. That is why Guatemala is pleased to have contributed to the establishment of the first densely inhabited nuclear-weapon-free zone, together with the countries of Latin America, which with vision and leadership have shown the world that it is possible to move towards a future without nuclear weapons.

This Treaty, to which Guatemala adhered with deep commitment, establishes our region as a pioneer in nuclear disarmament, serving as an example for other regions of the world in the creation

of similar zones. The Treaty of Tlatelolco and its full respect by all States Parties is a testament to the power of diplomacy and regional cooperation in solving global problems, as well as a reminder to the nuclear powers of our countries' rejection of the very existence of these weapons.

Guatemala has been and continues to be a tireless advocate of the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and complete nuclear disarmament, in a verifiable, transparent, and irreversible manner, and has taken a vocal position in condemning any nuclear test or threat of use of force in this time of arms that threaten the continuity of life on Earth. Our nation has been instrumental in promoting peace and security in the region and in the pursuit of a world free of nuclear weapons.

That is why we have assumed a dynamic role in OPANAL and for that very reason we have invited you today to meet in Guatemala, a country that protects life and peace. Two years ago, we made a commitment by becoming members of the Agency's Council and have actively participated in its activities. Proof of this is that, in 2021, we were Vice-Presidents of the 27th Session of the General Conference, we presided over the Special Session of the General Conference last year and this time we are hosting the 28th Session of the General Conference.

It is important to recall, Mr. President, that in February of this year, you, in your capacity as Minister for Foreign Affairs of Guatemala, visited the provisional headquarters of the Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean in Mexico City, together with a large delegation, accompanied once again, by a message of commitment and support for the Agency.

In Guatemala, we have promoted education and awareness of the devastating consequences of nuclear weapons, especially among the younger generations. This year, on the occasion of the anniversary of the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs welcomed officials from the Japanese Embassy in Guatemala to hold a photo exhibition event to raise awareness of the terrible consequences of the use of nuclear weapons.

In addition, this year, the sixth edition of the OPANAL Course on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons was held in Guatemala through the "Antonio José de Irisarri" Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the OPANAL Secretariat.

This course brought together more than 20 diplomats and officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of National Defense, Rafael Landívar University, the National Institute for Strategic Security Studies, and the Diplomatic Academy.

Mr. President,

Nuclear disarmament is a matter of vital importance for the survival of humankind and the preservation of global peace. Nuclear weapons have unimaginable destructive power, and their use can cause the loss of human life on a catastrophic scale. In an interconnected world like ours, the consequences of a nuclear conflict would not be limited to the nations involved but would affect the entire planet. Nuclear disarmament is therefore crucial to avoid a frightening scenario and ensure a safer future for future generations.

The very existence of nuclear weapons poses a threat, not only because of their destructive potential, but also because of the humanitarian consequences they entail.

The long-term effects of a nuclear attack include radiation, starvation, disease, and environmental devastation. The victims of a nuclear conflict, most of them civilians, would suffer unimaginable hardship.

It is important to remember that the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons undermines the fundamental principles and purposes of the United Nations Charter, international law, and international humanitarian law. The total elimination of nuclear weapons is essential to protect human dignity and rights.

Such weapons also contribute to instability and tension in international relations. The mere fact of their possession creates a climate of mistrust and fear among nations, often leading to an arms race. Resources for maintaining and modernizing nuclear arsenals could be used much more constructively to solve global problems, such as poverty alleviation, education, climate change, and so on. Nuclear disarmament, therefore, is not only a moral issue, but also an economic and political one.

The challenges we have faced at the global level in recent years, starting with the COVID-19 Pandemic, continuing with the illegal, unjustified and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine, increased by the situation that the Middle East is currently going through, as well as the permanent crisis in Haiti, shows us that every conflict that happens at the regional level, has an impact on an international level. This shows the need to strengthen multilateralism as a tool that allows us to establish spaces for dialogue that lead us to work on joint actions.

Guatemala, in its rich history, has overcome significant challenges and embraced peace as a core value. In a world where international tensions often dominate the headlines, our commitment to diplomacy and dialogue sets us apart.

Guatemala continues to advocate for peace and cooperation as channels for progress and the well-being of society. This legacy of peace should inspire us all to work tirelessly to build a safer world, and we can only achieve that in a world where weapons of mass destruction do not exist.

Mr. President,

Today, we reaffirm our commitment to disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, and we celebrate the Treaty of Tlatelolco as a historic achievement in this struggle. We recognize the role of OPANAL and all the countries of the region that have contributed to this noble cause.

Peace and security are not just abstract goals, they are fundamental to the well-being and future of our nations. Let us continue to work together, with determination and cooperation, to build a safer, more peaceful, and nuclear-weapon-free world.

In view of the foregoing, we believe that it is necessary to restore trust between nuclear-weapon States and non-nuclear-weapon States, and we therefore urge those countries that have made interpretative declarations to the additional protocols to the Treaty of Tlatelolco to review them with regard to the conditions, object, and purpose of this instrument.

To conclude, I would like to extend an invitation to the members of OPANAL that have not yet signed or ratified the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons to do so, as we are once again close to being the first region in the world where all its Member States demonstrate their example with commitments through a Treaty that seeks to generate world peace and stability through the prohibition and eventual elimination of nuclear weapons.

Thank you.