

The contribution of Latin America and the Caribbean to a strong nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime

By Ambassador Luis Alfonso de Alba

The overwhelming destruction and suffering caused by the tragic events of 1945 in Hiroshima and Nagasaki marked the beginning of international awareness on the imperative need to revert to a nuclear-weapon-free world. Since then many countries and individuals have been working towards that end.

In 1963 Latin American leaders promoted the idea of a treaty for a nuclear-weapon-free zone (NWFZ) in Latin America and the Caribbean, as a first step towards a nuclear-weapon-free world. Mexican diplomat and Nobel Prize Laureate, Alfonso García Robles, played a pivotal role in the negotiations and promotion of the treaty.

After years of negotiations, in 1967 the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean, better known as the Treaty of Tlatelolco, established the first nuclear-weapon-free zone in a densely populated area. It has been a model and reference for the creation of other nuclear-weapon-free zones in different parts of the world, thus contributing to international peace and stability. But, as stated in its preamble, establishing militarily denuclearized zones is not an end in itself but rather a means for achieving general and complete disarmament at a later stage.

With the ratification of Cuba in 2002, the regime established by the Tlatelolco Treaty is now complete. The only pending issue, which

Latin American Governments are strongly working on, is the withdrawal of the unilateral declarations made by the nuclear weapons States when they signed or ratified Additional Protocols I and II of the Treaty. These unilateral declarations imply exceptions to the commitment of non-use of nuclear weapons against any of the States Parties of the Tlatelolco Treaty.

In the current international scenario and particularly now that all States in the region have explicitly renounced the nuclear option, the *raison d'être* for maintaining these unilateral declarations can no longer be justified. The collective Latin American decision to renounce the nuclear option should be reciprocated by the nuclear weapons States. In these difficult times, withdrawing the unilateral declarations would send a positive message to the international community.

In a broader perspective, Latin American countries have also played a very important role since the beginning of the negotiations that led to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear

Weapons (NPT) and they continue to be active players in this context.

In 2000, during the NPT Review Conference the five nuclear weapons States agreed unequivocally to totally eliminate their nuclear arsenals, which would eventually lead to nuclear disarmament. Thirteen steps towards nuclear disarmament were agreed upon. Unfortunately, since this important accomplishment, there have been indications that some States no longer support all of these steps.

The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty constitutes a fundamental instrument in the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime. Since its inception it has had strong support from Latin American and Caribbean countries. Practically all Annex 2 States in Latin America have ratified the Treaty, thus facilitating its entry into force. To date, 49 monitoring facilities are located in Latin America and the Caribbean. Furthermore, Mexico has been a particularly strong advocate of the Treaty, calling for its early entry into force and for a strong verification regime, as well as promoting resolutions on the Treaty in various forums.

In spite of these efforts, carried out not only by Latin American countries but also by a significant number of other countries, the ultimate goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world still faces serious difficulties. Mexico will continue to pursue actively this objective by pressing for the compliance with the 2000 NPT agreements.

It is essential that all the countries that have explicitly renounced the nuclear option (be it those already



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Biographical note



Luis Alfonso de Alba, Permanent Representative of Mexico to the International Organizations in Geneva, was elected Chairman of the United Nations

First Committee on Disarmament and International Security in June 2004. Earlier this year, he represented the New Agenda Coalition at the third session of the Preparatory Committee of the 2005 NPT Review Conference.

Ambassador de Alba joined the diplomatic service in 1981 and served in several high-ranking positions, including Deputy Permanent Representative of Mexico to the United Nations in New York and Deputy Permanent Representative of Mexico to the Organization of American States in Washington, D.C. Ambassador de Alba holds a B.A. in International Affairs from the Institute d'Etudes des Relations Internationales in Paris, France. ■

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belonging to a nuclear-weapon-free zone or those aspiring at establishing one), join efforts to expand and strengthen the regimes aiming for a nuclear-weapon-free world. Following this logic, last year Mexico launched an initiative to hold a conference of States Parties to NWFZs and States interested in establishing new NWFZs, with a view to consolidate the coordination and cooperation between denuclearized zones and to promote a global non-proliferation regime.

This initiative is widely supported by the Latin American countries, as reflected in a resolution by the Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean (OPANAL), and by States Parties and Signatories of the Treaties of Rarotonga, Bangkok and Pelindaba. In order to prepare for the conference the Permanent Representatives of these States in New York have already started to work on a draft declaration.

The objective of this conference is to consider means to enhance the dialogue, cooperation and sharing of experiences between States Parties, Signatories and other interested States, with the aim to promote convergence in the implementation of the provisions of the treaties and to strengthen non-proliferation. This conference will take place before the next NPT Review Conference in 2005 in Mexico City and will be open to all NPT States Parties, as well as to civil society actors. I am sure that this initiative will contribute significantly to the strengthening of the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime as a whole.

In a world full of new challenges and with new threats emerging, including the possibility of non-state actors acquiring weapons of mass destruction, we must all join forces to reduce the dangers posed by proliferation and to strive for the total elimination of nuclear weapons, as both nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation are mutually reinforcing processes. ■