



# Nuclear Weapons Free Zones

## *The Untold Success Story of Nuclear Disarmament and Non-Proliferation*

*An Atomic Mirror Briefing Paper by Janet Bloomfield and Pamela S. Meidell*

*"[Mexican] Ambassador Alfonso Garcia Robles, the father of the Treaty of Tlatelolco, was wont to say that Nuclear Weapons Free Zones [NWFZs] were not an end in themselves, but rather a means for achieving general and complete nuclear disarmament. Those inspired words were captured in the Preamble<sup>1</sup> of the Treaty of Tlatelolco and time has proven the wisdom of them. But in the meantime, until an agreement is reached to abolish nuclear weapons, NWFZs are still the best way to continue the journey toward general and complete disarmament."*

Edmundo Vargas Carreño, Secretary-General of OPANAL  
(Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean), December 2004<sup>2</sup>

### Background

Since the end of the Cold War, the fitful momentum toward nuclear disarmament has screeched to a halt under the current US administration. But the obligation to bring about nuclear disarmament and abolition does not rest solely with the nuclear weapons states (NWS).<sup>3</sup>

A similarly belligerent and fearful atmosphere after the Cuban Missile Crisis in the early 1960s prompted the countries of the Latin American and Caribbean Region to create the world's first Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (NWFZ) Treaty. The 1967 Treaty of Tlatelolco set the standard for all subsequent NWFZ treaties, predating and preparing the way for the most widely agreed treaty in the world: the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Since 1967, three more zones have been created: the 1985 Treaty of Rarotonga, covering the South Pacific, the 1996 Treaty of Bangkok, covering Southeast Asia, and the 1997 Treaty of Pelindaba, covering Africa. The continent of Antarctica is a de facto Nuclear Weapons Free Zone under the provisions of the 1959 Antarctic Treaty, which bans all nuclear explosions and radioactive waste disposal. Similarly, the Earth's orbit, the moon and all other celestial bodies, are also de facto NWFZs under the 1967 Outer Space Treaty. Each succeeding treaty has been stricter than previous ones, adding to and building on the strengths of earlier ones: the Treaty of Rarotonga, for example, forbids nuclear test explosions, the Treaty of Bangkok prohibits nuclear transport within the Economic Exclusion Zones of treaty parties, and the Treaty of Pelindaba renounces nuclear weapons research. Within existing NWFZs, New Zealand and the Philippines have added national legislation to strengthen protections of their territory. In addition, Austria (1999) and Mongolia (2000) are each single-state NWFZs.

### Shared Characteristics of Nuclear Weapons Free Zones

All existing NWFZs:

- ensure the absence of nuclear weapons in a regional zone of application defined within the treaty,
- exemplify a regional effort to create a common security structure,
- contribute to nuclear non-proliferation, promote nuclear restraint and general and complete disarmament,
- use nuclear materials and facilities under the jurisdiction of the treaty parties for exclusively peaceful purposes,
- commit the parties to abstain from carrying out, promoting, or authorizing, directly or indirectly, the testing, use, fabrication, production, possession, or control of all nuclear weapons or to participate in these activities in any form,
- prohibit the receipt, storage, installation, deployment or any form of possession of all nuclear weapons, directly or indirectly by any of the parties, by order of third parties or by any other means,
- place all regional facilities under the inspection regime of the International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA), and
- enjoy negative security assurances granted to them by the NWS through NWFZ treaty protocols.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "That the military denuclearization of Latin America and the Caribbean ... will constitute a measure which will spare their peoples from the squandering of their limited resources on nuclear armaments and will protect them against possible nuclear attacks on their territories, and will also constitute a significant contribution towards preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons and a powerful factor for general and complete disarmament..." For full treaty text, see [www.opanal.org/opanal/Tlatelolco/Tlatelolco-i.htm](http://www.opanal.org/opanal/Tlatelolco/Tlatelolco-i.htm)

<sup>2</sup> Speaking at the Parliamentary Network for Nuclear Disarmament Conference, Wellington, Aotearoa/New Zealand on December 8, 2004. For proceedings, see [www.gsintstitute.org/pnnd/events\\_pnndinternationalforum.htm](http://www.gsintstitute.org/pnnd/events_pnndinternationalforum.htm)

<sup>3</sup> As mandated by Article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

<sup>4</sup> "Strengthening Existing Nuclear Weapons Free Zones," by Devon Chaffee and Jim Wurst, [www.icnp.org/disarmament/nwzf/StrengtheningExistingNWFZ.htm](http://www.icnp.org/disarmament/nwzf/StrengtheningExistingNWFZ.htm)

## Current Status of Nuclear Weapons Free Zones

In 1967, twenty-two years after the beginning of the Nuclear Age in 1945, the world witnessed the creation of the first NWFZ, thereby grounding the hope for a nuclear-free world.

Today, one NWFZ treaty or another covers virtually the entire Southern Hemisphere of our planet.<sup>5</sup> In 2000, under the sponsorship of Brazil and Aotearoa/New Zealand, the UN General Assembly called for the creation of a Southern Hemisphere and adjacent areas NWFZ treaty, uniting the current zones around the planet.<sup>6</sup> The next NWFZ may well be the Central Asian NWFZ covering the countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. This treaty needs only the signatures of the NWS on its protocols to enter into force. Throughout the world, hundreds of cities and municipalities have declared themselves nuclear-weapons-free. While without international legal status, these zones generate significant political will and public support for nuclear disarmament and larger regional NWFZs.

Regional bodies can negotiate NWFZs as preventive disarmament measures, thereby taking action independent of the NWS to create a common security structure. Unfortunately, the package of agreements agreed at the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference in 2000 includes no reference to NWFZs despite the following reference in Article VII of the NPT that encourages the creation of these progressive alliances:

*"Nothing in this Treaty affects the right of any group of States to conclude regional treaties in order to assure the total absence of nuclear weapons in their respective territories."*

## Future Prospects

As we near the NPT Review Conference in May 2005, and hear cries in the media and the NWS to reign in nuclear proliferation, we would do well to remember that many parts of the globe have already given us a tested and flexible model that provides for both non-proliferation and disarmament.

Regional NWFZs form the heart of the untold success story of the road to a nuclear-weapons free world; they are one of our best hopes for bringing it into being. We can expand upon and link these zones as part of the global menu to achieve nuclear abolition. NWFZs in the Middle East, South Asia, Northeast Asia, and Central Europe are currently under discussion in respective regions and at the UN. These proposed NWFZs differ significantly from previous ones in that they all include or border on de facto or declared NWS. They also indicate a transition from a passive but legally protected region to a region where active disarmament is carried out. Establishing a Central European NWFZ, for example, would require the actual withdrawal, dismantling and destruction of nuclear weapons.<sup>7</sup> Establishing such a zone in Northeast Asia would require the folding and withdrawal of the US nuclear umbrella.<sup>8</sup>

While it is important and necessary to create new NWFZs, strengthening existing zones contributes to the creation of a nuclear-free world. In this regard, Mexico has called for an international Conference of the Parties to NWFZs treaties to take place in April 2005, just prior to the NPT Review Conference. Such a conference, which has never before been convened, would bring together over 110 countries with a strong shared agenda.

At a time when people and governments of nearly every persuasion look for better ways to be safe and create the conditions for their children and societies to flourish, the citizens and governments of the world's NWFZs have much to teach us. In a post 9/11 world, it is more important than ever to create regional zones of safety and security that foster cooperation and trust among neighboring states. Sustaining and expanding NWFZs can lead the way to nuclear abolition and the fulfilment of the NPT promises.

## Recommendations

1. All NWS complete the signing of extant protocols for the existing NWFZ treaties.
2. All relevant states complete the signing and ratifying of the NWFZ pertaining to their region.
3. Create new NWFZs in the Middle East, South Asia, Northeast Asia, Central Asia, and Central Europe.
4. Support the creation of a Southern Hemisphere (and Adjacent Areas) NWFZ.
5. Support the international Conference of the Parties to NWFZs treaties in Mexico City, April 26-28, 2005.
6. Encourage governments to put the development and expansion of NWFZs on the agenda of the forthcoming NPT Review Conference
7. All governments and civil society organizations continue to educate and raise public awareness about NWFZs and their potential for the creation of a nuclear-free world.

*"Any fool can make things bigger, more complex, and more violent. It takes a touch of genius – and a lot of courage – to move in the opposite direction." Albert Einstein*

<sup>5</sup> Current NWFZ treaties cover nearly half the globe: Treaty of Rarotonga (South Pacific), Treaty of Tlatelolco (Latin America and the Caribbean), Treaty of Bangkok (Southeast Asia), Treaty of Pelindaba (Africa).

<sup>6</sup> UN General Assembly Resolution 56/24 G 29 November 2000 <http://disarmament2.un.org/vote.nsf>

<sup>7</sup> Concept paper for Nuclear Weapons-Free Zones: Crucial Steps towards a Nuclear-Free World, International Seminar, Uppsala, Sweden, 1-4 September 2000, [www.tni.org/nukes/index.htm](http://www.tni.org/nukes/index.htm)

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.