

**Message to the
International Seminar:
“The Experience of the NWFZ in Latin America and the Caribbean and the
perspective towards 2015 and beyond”
commemorating the 45th Anniversary of the Signing of the Treaty of Tlatelolco**

Mexico City, 14-15 February 2012

Her Excellency Ambassador Patricia Espinosa Cantellano, Secretary of Foreign Affairs of Mexico

Her Excellency Ambassador Gioconda Ubeda Rivera, OPANAL Secretary General
Excellencies

Representatives of the many organizations and agencies whose cooperation has made this seminar possible

Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of Soka Gakkai International (SGI) members in 192 countries and territories around the world, I wish to offer my heartfelt felicitations on the holding of this international seminar marking the 45th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Tlatelolco, which established the first Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (NWFZ) in an inhabited region. I would like to offer my special appreciation to the Government of Mexico, a pioneering advocate of efforts to achieve a world without nuclear weapons.

For the members of the SGI, this year has a particular significance as it marks the 55th anniversary of the declaration made by our mentor Josei Toda (1900–58), second president of the Soka Gakkai, in which he called for the abolition of nuclear weapons, denouncing them as an absolute evil. As heirs to the spirit of Buddhist pacifism that motivated Toda, we have subsequently worked to develop a movement for peace through dialogue as a civil society organization.

Some 30 years ago, I had the honor to give a lecture entitled “On the Mexican Poetic Spirit” at the University of Guadalajara. In that lecture I touched on the fact that OPANAL is headquartered here in Mexico and stated my belief that the animating spirit of the region—“an acute awareness of human rights and commitment to the values of freedom, equality and independence—the essential qualities that enable men and women to live in a humane manner”—was crucial in realizing the historic achievement of the treaty.

I feel that this sensibility resonates deeply with the spirit of Buddhism, in particular the key concept of “dependent origination” which urges us to appreciate our individual existence within a framework of interconnection and interdependence. In simplest terms, this is to be understood as a recognition of the fact that happiness and misery, deprivation and prosperity are at the deepest level always shared between ourselves and others, and that any attempt to achieve happiness at the expense of others’ suffering is not only ethically unacceptable but in fact doomed to failure.

The world's nuclear arsenals have the capacity to kill or grievously injure all people living on Earth as well as their progeny, and to destroy the global ecosystem many times over. We are impelled to ask what interests are served—what, exactly, is being protected—by this unimaginable destructive capacity. Even if some portion of the population of one of the combatant nations were to survive a nuclear confrontation, what would await them could hardly be termed a future. Any use of nuclear weapons will not stop at bringing the opponent to its knees, but will efface and obliterate the future we all must share. It is from this perspective that I have repeatedly condemned these weapons as an absolute evil that have no place in the world.

At the same time, we face an enormous accumulation of common challenges—poverty and environmental degradation, critical levels of unemployment—that all countries and peoples must come together to resolve. The diversion of the human and economic resources required to meet these challenges to the maintenance of nuclear arsenals is a truly foolish and benighted choice.

The path to nuclear weapons abolition has never been an easy one. When the Treaty of Tlatelolco was opened for signature in 1967, Cuba, which in that time of Cold War confrontation was aligned with the Eastern Bloc, did not participate. It likewise took many years before Argentina, Brazil and Chile were able to ratify the treaty.

With the 2002 ratification of the treaty by Cuba, it came into force with the full participation of all countries within the zone of application. This was the outcome of 35 years of persistent and dedicated effort. It was a coming to fruition of the deep commitment to human rights and strong determination to enable men and women to live in a humane manner that characterizes the region of Latin America and the Caribbean.

There is much that we must learn from this proud history and from the wisdom and conviction that made it possible. Our success in sharing these lessons and encouraging these qualities in people everywhere will be crucial in achieving the goal of a world free from the threat of nuclear weapons.

Resonating with and inspired by the rich sensibilities of the region, we are determined, as part of global civil society, to contribute to the positive sharing of the invaluable lessons that have been learned here. We look forward to working together with you in the search for paths to regional denuclearization in the Middle East and Northeast Asia.

We are further convinced that dialogue is the only means by which these goals can be pursued. It is through persistent dialogue and discussion among citizens that people's consciousness—not only of how things are but how they should be—is transformed. By deepening bonds of solidarity we can create new realities, including new policy stances within governments. Such efforts represent a condensed model of democracy in the historic struggle to move away from a culture of violence and toward a culture of peace. This, we feel, represents the greatest strength of grassroots movements such as ours.

The Treaty of Tlatelolco is a source of great courage, hope and illumination for the

difficult undertaking of freeing the world of the nuclear threat. As William Epstein, who was involved in the drafting of the treaty, has put it:

... when I first became involved in the work of the Treaty, I was told by senior diplomats of four nuclear Powers—the United States, the former USSR, United Kingdom and France and indeed of my own country Canada—that I would be wasting my time and that there would never be an agreement on such a Treaty. ... It seems to be a truism that in politics and diplomacy, “never” never means never. ... All 33 States of Latin America and the Caribbean have signed the Treaty and all five declared nuclear Powers are now Parties.

I share the confidence that resounds through these words. I firmly believe that the complete elimination of nuclear weapons—so often dismissed as an impossibility—can without fail be achieved if we succeed in mustering the awakened power and solidarity of the world’s people.

The time has come for clear-sighted political leaders and civil society to come together and pool their capabilities toward the realization of the noble goal of a world without nuclear weapons. The strengthening and expansion of Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones, alongside efforts toward the realization of a Nuclear Weapons Convention, represent invaluable milestones toward the achievement of that goal. We are determined to continue our own efforts to this end and look forward to working with our distinguished colleagues and friends in this endeavor.

In closing, please allow me to offer my personal prayers for the health and well-being of all participants and for the further flourishing of the participating States, organizations and agencies.

February 14, 2012

Daisaku Ikeda
President
Soka Gakkai International