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Latin American and Caribbean Leadership Network
for Nuclear Disarmament and Nonproliferation

Inaugural Statement

Latin American and Caribbean Leadership Network for Nuclear Disarmament and Nonproliferation June 2013

The international scene has become everyday more unstable and dangerous. Global security no longer hinges solely on strategic talks between a small group of nuclear powers. Other players have increased their power and international influence. Nuclear arsenals, terrorism, insurgency and organized crime in different corners of the globe add an exceptionally high level of risk to already complex global dynamics.

The acquisition, possession or use of a sophisticated or an improvised nuclear device by a state, terrorists or other new actors, is a scenario that is emerging as a realistic, in-extremis threat to world security.

In quantitative terms, nine countries own a total of some 17,000 nuclear weapons. They are right now deployed in 14 countries or circulating around the world's oceans. Each one of these devices, in and of itself, poses a grave risk as they could be detonated deliberately, by error or by accident. To make this risk even more severe, there are large amounts of weapons-usable nuclear materials in over 30 countries which could be targeted for theft, illicit trafficking or use.

While the risk is very real, it is not perceived in many countries. The governments and societies believe that such risk will never play out. It is imperative, therefore, to warn all that the catastrophic reach of a nuclear incident of any origin would be global in nature. In today's highly interconnected world, no country would escape the international chaos, devastation and poverty that would result from such a tragic event, regardless of whether it happened in its own territory or not.

On the basis of these considerations we believe that it is crucial that all governments of the world, without exception, fully understand the seriousness of the threats involved and that they embrace as a matter of national priority the measures required to effectively reduce them.

With this in mind, and taking into account our experience in high-ranking positions in international organizations and governments of Latin America and the Caribbean, we feel we have a responsibility to make the best possible use of our skills in promoting policies to enhance regional and world security, thus helping reduce all forms of nuclear risk and advance toward the goal of a total elimination of nuclear weapons.

In order to give structure to our work we have decided to create the Latin American and Caribbean Leadership Network which has been founded with the overriding objective of promoting nuclear disarmament, preventing proliferation and strengthening all aspects of regional security.

We the undersigned declare that we are committed to the complete, irreversible and verifiable elimination of all nuclear weapons in the world. We believe that nuclear weapons from the very start have been a scourge on mankind. The experiences of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have provided horrific examples of the catastrophic humanitarian consequences that can arise from the use of nuclear weapons.

Despite these lessons, we are increasingly bewildered by the vast amount of financial and human resources that countries, having or seeking nuclear weapons, earmark to develop, maintain and expand the destructive potential of the arsenals. These expenditures are made in line with security doctrines that overestimate the relevance of nuclear arms. We believe that these doctrines, vestiges of the Cold War, have lost any possible justification, in the same way that the concept of mutual dissuasion based on nuclear arsenals has become anachronistic.

Given the fact that nuclear risks are on the upswing, we believe the world should immediately outlaw nuclear weapons, in the same way that this has been done with chemical and biological weapons.

At the same time, the international community should join together in a common struggle to energetically forestall proliferation and nuclear terrorism in all of its conceivable shapes and forms.

The international outlook is discouraging. Since the mid-90s attempts to negotiate and adopt concrete and effective multilateral action on these issues have repeatedly faced stubborn obstacles. Nuclear armed states persistently avoid fulfilling their disarmament commitments. Meanwhile, these states warn others about the risks of proliferation and the acquisition of weapons by non-state actors, advocating the implementation of more stringent measures for the development and use of nuclear technology. But with the absence of concrete progress toward nuclear disarmament, states without nuclear weapons are increasingly reluctant to accept obligations that they see as exacerbating the discrimination between “haves” and “have-nots”.

In this sense, we believe that nuclear disarmament, nonproliferation and reduction of threats derived from nuclear terrorism are a joint responsibility of all states, those with and those without weapons. As such we advocate cooperative work by all in a matrix of transversally linked projects designed to move the global community closer to achieving these superior goals.

We also stress our profound conviction that nuclear risks must be reduced while at the same time preserving for the nations of the region and of the rest of the world the right to develop nuclear technology and benefit from the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

We are determined through the Leadership Network that today takes form, to work so as to assure that the states of Latin America and the Caribbean continue in brotherhood to deepen and strengthen the goals that gave life to the Tlatelolco Treaty, the agreement with which they renounced nuclear weapons and in 1969 created the first nuclear weapons free zone in a populated region.

We believe in the enduring nature of the harmony, understanding and peaceful relations that paved the way for the Treaty of Tlatelolco. Its example was later emulated by other countries, leading to the creation of four other nuclear weapons free zones. Similarly, the region has led the way with constructive bilateral understandings, such as the one that exists between Argentina and Brazil. These agreements have helped avoid competition between countries for supremacy in the nuclear field.

Based on its successful track record, the Latin America and the Caribbean region is now in a privileged position to elaborate and propose constructive solutions in the search for new understandings that could lead to progress in the efforts to achieve disarmament, enforce nuclear nonproliferation and strengthen regional and global security. The Network will seek innovative ways to bring these actions to life.

We will harness our regional identity to ensure that no security vulnerabilities in Latin America and the Caribbean could lead, whether by act or omission, to the increase of nuclear risks anywhere in the world. We will also work for the continual improvement of institutions and the quality of democracy in the countries of the region, as this is central to the reduction of these weaknesses.

We specifically advocate that no state in the region should in any way contribute to the deployment of nuclear weapons in the zone or to the development of nuclear programs for non-peaceful purposes anywhere in the world. Nor should these states contribute in any way to the illicit trafficking of nuclear materials or technology, or to any possible use of such materials with terrorist purposes.

By promoting mutual understanding among the countries of the region, we aspire to foster a shared vision that will translate into a multilateral policy that is effective, coherent and responsible, as well as being linked to practical and realistic scenarios involving weapons of mass destruction. This vision will encompass the strengthening of international security and reduction of regional weaknesses and vulnerabilities. It will also contemplate international cooperation for the suppression of acts of terrorism as well as an increasing debate on the humanitarian consequences of the use of nuclear weapons. We will also analyze and give priority to actions to activate international forums for discussion and negotiation of instruments in the field of disarmament, nonproliferation and international security.

We intend to work with leaders and organizations around the world to coordinate efforts and in this way achieve effective joint action.

The Latin American and Caribbean Leadership Network for Nuclear Disarmament and Nonproliferation have defined the following priority issues for the region:

1. To promote nuclear disarmament and arms control as a required step toward a world without nuclear weapons. This includes debates relating to negotiation of international instruments for the prohibition of nuclear weapons, and as intermediate steps, effective actions relating to negative security assurances, deterrence, non-first use and other proposals for arms control. The role of countries without nuclear weapons in progressive nuclear disarmament will be a central point of such debates.
2. To actively work for the nonproliferation of nuclear weapons as well as for nuclear verification and transparency in Latin America and the Caribbean, with a focus on mutual assurances of peaceful uses among the countries in the region, and toward the international community.
3. To strengthen regional security in all its forms, both national and regional, alerting governments of regional weaknesses and vulnerabilities that could facilitate acts of terrorism, theft or illicit trafficking of nuclear material and technology as well as to propose measures to counter the threats. Consequences for the region of a possible nuclear incident, occurring anywhere on the planet will be also identified.
4. To strengthen and improve the Nuclear Weapons Free Zone in Latin America and the Caribbean. Includes discussion and action on potential improvements to the Treaty of Tlatelolco, with focus on the relationship between Treaty parties and nuclear armed states, as well as on obstacles to develop and consolidate nuclear weapons free zones around the world. We will also seek to publicize our experience as a region.
5. To help develop regional capabilities through effective communication and education, encompassing governments and other social actors.

This is a crucial moment in the history of efforts for nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation in the world. With no end in sight, the ongoing global impasse is alarming and unacceptable, carrying with it the risk of destroying the hard-earned positive results of recent decades.

As Latin American and the Caribbean citizens we feel that we must employ the full measure of our influence to positively impact on world events. We will intend to do this through the Latin American Leadership Network, brought to life today, the Secretariat of which will operate from the city of Buenos Aires.

We are confident that our efforts will be an original and effective contribution to the achievement of the goals and aspirations of the vast majority of international actors who seek to offer future generations a legacy of peace and a safer world without nuclear threats.

Released on June 18, 2013

[Signed]

Sergio Abreu, former Minister of Foreign Affairs and current Senator of Uruguay.

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Jaime Ravinet de la Fuente, former Minister of Defense of Chile.

Camilo Reyes Rodríguez, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Colombia.

Ronaldo Mota Sardenberg, former Minister of Science and Technology and member of the Brazil's diplomatic service.

Noel Sinclair, Permanent Observer of the Caribbean Community - CARICOM to the United Nations and member of the Guyana's diplomatic service.

