



## **Statement by the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) to the XXIX Session of the General Conference of OPANAL**

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Delivered by Maria Eugenia Villareal, SEHLAC's representative to the ICAN's International Steering Group

Distinguished Chair, Excellencies, Delegates,

It is an honor to address you on behalf of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons. Latin America and the Caribbean have long shown the world that regional leadership and legal imagination can bend the arc toward disarmament. The Treaty of Tlatelolco did not merely anticipate a safer future; it built one—and it continues to do so through OPANAL's vigilant stewardship.

Yet our region's achievement is not self-executing. Global nuclear risks are rising; rhetoric normalizing nuclear “options” has crept back into public debate, including in some quarters of our own region. In recent months, for example, statements by Brazilian parliamentarians and members of government appearing to defend the pursuit or military utility of nuclear weapons have raised understandable concern, although they do not reflect the official government stance. Such notions are at odds with the letter and spirit of Tlatelolco, the constitutional traditions of peace that many of our states uphold, and the overwhelming humanitarian, environmental, economic, and legal case against nuclear arms.

ICAN respectfully underscores three points.

- **First, the Latin American and Caribbean nuclear-weapon-free zone is a living legal order that demands active defense.** That defense includes unequivocal rejection of any doctrine that seeks to reintroduce nuclear weapons—directly or indirectly—into our security equations. It requires constant verification, vigilance, robust transparency, and firm diplomatic responses to any action or discourse that would erode the zone’s integrity. OPANAL, with the support of States Parties, should continue using every tool at its disposal—political, legal, and technical—to safeguard Tlatelolco’s

prohibitions and guarantees, including proactive engagement when national debates threaten to drift toward nuclear armament narratives.

- **Second, the most substantial reinforcement of Tlatelolco today is deeper alignment with the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW).** The TPNW operationalizes our region's normative leadership at the global level by delegitimizing nuclear weapons comprehensively—prohibiting possession, use and threat of use, assistance, and stationing—while centering humanitarian imperatives, environmental remediation, and victim assistance. Many states in this room have already signed and ratified the TPNW; ICAN commends you and encourages remaining states of the region to complete accession processes without delay. In this regard, we warmly welcome the recent decision by the Congress of Colombia to approve ratification of the TPNW, as well as the progress being made towards the treaty's universalisation in the Caribbean. For Brazil—a historic champion of disarmament and safeguards—swift ratification would decisively reaffirm its constitutional and diplomatic vocation for peace, strengthen its credibility as a global South leader, and send an unmistakable signal that nuclear weapons have no place in its security policy. We also urge Argentina, as the only TPNW non-signatory in Latin America, to reconsider its position. Argentina and Brazil have a strong strategic relationship that will be reinforced by both being parties to the TPNW. We hope to see urgent steps in this direction.
- **Third, our region's comparative advantages should be mobilized to meet emerging challenges.** Latin America and the Caribbean possess unique assets: a mature regional treaty body in OPANAL; an exemplary bilateral safeguards agency in ABACC; scientific and regulatory expertise; and vibrant academic, parliamentary, and civil society communities. These should be harnessed to address contemporary risks—from the integration of artificial intelligence into early-warning and command systems, to strategic competition that elevates nuclear signaling, to the climate-security nexus that multiplies humanitarian harm from any nuclear detonation.

Concretely, ICAN encourages:

1. Regional TPNW implementation cooperation: joint workshops on national legislation, criminalization of TPNW-prohibited activities, and alignment with export-control and compliance regimes.
2. Safeguards and transparency leadership: leveraging ABACC's know-how to champion stronger verification cultures, including support for comprehensive safeguards.
3. Humanitarian preparedness and environmental justice: coordinated planning for victim assistance and environmental remediation obligations under the

TPNW, building capacity among health, emergency, and environmental authorities.

4. AI and emerging-technology risk reduction: an OPANAL-convened dialogue with technical agencies and experts on guardrails to prevent automation-driven escalation and on preserving meaningful human control across nuclear-related decision chains.
5. Parliamentary engagement: an annual OPANAL-Parliamentarians Forum, in partnership with ICAN's parliamentary networks, to brief legislators on treaty obligations, budgetary implications, export controls, and to inoculate democratic debate against disinformation about nuclear "deterrence."
6. Youth and survivor leadership: sustained support for Latin American hibakusha testimonies, nuclear test survivors from other regions, and youth fellows to anchor policy in lived experience and humanitarian law.

Allow me to address the Brazilian debate directly, in a spirit of respect and friendship. Brazil's Constitution, its multi-decade leadership in nonproliferation and disarmament, its role in creating ABACC, and its pivotal diplomacy in negotiating the TPNW, all point in one direction: the renunciation of nuclear weapons. Arguments to the contrary neglect legal obligations, invite strategic and economic costs, and contradict Brazil's hard-won credibility as a builder of peace. The quickest, clearest way to close the door on regression is to ratify the TPNW and to deepen cooperation with OPANAL and regional partners on full implementation.

Excellencies, the synergy between Tlatelolco and the TPNW offers a practical roadmap from regional prohibition to global elimination. Our region has never hosted nuclear weapons; we must ensure it never will. Let us defend our nuclear-weapon-free zone not only as a regional achievement, but as a platform for global norm entrepreneurship: delegitimizing nuclear weapons everywhere, advancing humanitarian protections, and reducing the risk of catastrophe for all.

ICAN stands ready to work with OPANAL, its Member States, parliaments, universities, regulators, and civil society across Latin America and the Caribbean to translate commitments into national laws, budgets, training programs, and measurable progress. Together, we can keep our region free of nuclear weapons—and help make the rest of the world look a little more like Latin America and the Caribbean.

Thank you.