

DISCURSO DE ABERTURA DO SEMINÁRIO
“TOWARDS A WORLD FREE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS:
CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES”

Brasília, 7 e 8 de dezembro

Palácio Itamaraty – Sala San Tiago Dantas

Dear Minister of State Sergio Westphalen Etchegoyen, Head of the Cabinet for Institutional Security of the Presidency of the Republic,

Distinguished Heads of Diplomatic Missions accredited to the Brazilian Government,

Distinguished Secretary General of the Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America (OPANAL), Ambassador Luiz Filipe de Macedo Soares,

Distinguished Director of the Alexandre Gusmão Foundation, Ambassador Sérgio Moreira Lima,

Distinguished President of the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs and former High Representative of the United Nations for Disarmament Affairs, Ambassador Sérgio Duarte,

Distinguished Secretaries of the Brazilian-Argentine Agency for Accounting and Control of Nuclear Material, Doctors Marco Marzo and Sergio Somelsky,

Distinguished speakers and other participants,

It is a great honor for me to preside over the opening ceremony of the Seminar “Towards a world without nuclear weapons: challenges and perspectives”.

Several reasons lead me to emphasize the convenience and usefulness of this initiative.

Firstly, we are commemorating important anniversaries for the nuclear global agenda. Last year we celebrated the 25th anniversary of the Brazilian-Argentina Agency for Accounting and Control of Nuclear Material (ABACC), which is one of the greatest diplomatic legacies of the rapprochement between Brazil and Argentina.

Last February, we joined our regional neighbors in the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean, in Mexico City. Next year will mark 50th years of the opening for signature of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

Secondly, the importance of this Seminar derives from the growing relevance of nuclear disarmament in the international agenda. The adoption by the United Nations last July of a Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to the organization “International Campaign for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons” bear out eloquently that assumption.

Last but not least, this initiative was conceived against the backdrop of fostering dialogue and transparency, one of the priorities of our Minister Aloysio Nunes. By holding this seminar, Itamaraty renews its openness to the civil society, academia and think-tanks, including to discuss sensitive topics pertaining to our national security agenda.

I am pleased to acknowledge the presence in this seminar of distinguished experts from different areas. I can thus foresee high-level intellectual debates in the thematic panels. On behalf of the Foreign Affairs Minister Aloysio Nunes, I extend a warm welcome to all the participants.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The expression « weapons of mass destruction » was used for the first time eighty years ago. In a reference to the aerial bombing of Guernica, the London newspaper « The Times » cautioned in December 1937 : « Who can think without horror of what another widespread war would mean, waged as it would be with all the new weapons of mass destruction ? »

Although the expression referred to conventional weapons, the spirit behind the new term was indignation with a power of destruction hitherto unthinkable to civilized conscience, as the result of the application of technological modernization to the military sphere.

The emergence of nuclear weapons altered the assumptions of international relations. Man acquired the capacity to extinguish life on earth, a power previously reserved to natural disasters.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are convinced that the call of the United Nations Charter to save "future generations from the scourge of war" makes the protection of humanity

from nuclear weapons a value shared by all states, social groups and individuals.

The ideal of a world free of nuclear weapons cannot be rejected or postponed just because it is too ambitious. We remain under the daily risk of the use of nuclear weapons, in conflict or by accident, with more than ten thousand warheads on alert, which can be triggered in a matter of minutes.

It is in this sense that I reiterate Brazil's firm commitment to all the major international treaties that deal with these issues. We were the first country to sign the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Brazil - enshrined in its Constitution the prohibition of the use nuclear energy for non-peaceful purposes - has the moral authority and political disposition to call for concrete results in nuclear disarmament.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons by the United Nations last July, with the support of 122 countries, is a strong evidence of the commitment of the vast majority of the international community to a world free of nuclear weapons.

This legal instrument is an important complement to the NPT, the preamble of which urges States parties "to make every effort to avert the danger of a nuclear war".

Brazil is proud of having integrated the core group of countries at the forefront of the negotiating process. The treaty is consistent with the values hold dear by Brazil's foreign policy, as enshrined in our Constitution: the defense of peace, the preeminence of human rights and the exclusively peaceful use of nuclear energy.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The polarization within the NPT regime precedes the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. We are not, strictly speaking, against the gradual or progressive approach to nuclear disarmament. Indeed, over the past decades we have spared no effort to achieve its fulfilment: we have worked actively to bring about the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, the revitalization of the Geneva Conference on Disarmament, and the negotiation of a Treaty on Fissile Materials and of a Convention on Nuclear Disarmament.

Nonetheless, the long time elapsed with no progress in these initiatives and the discouraging signs received from nuclear powers have led us to seek concrete results. Brazil believes that the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons offers a safe and objective pathway for nuclear disarmament.

Brazil participates actively in the "International Partnership for the Verification of Nuclear Disarmament" and therefore is aware that the establishment a nuclear disarmament verification regime will take time. This will not be a quick or simple undertaking. We reject, however, the argument that the international community must wait for an "ideal conjuncture", the attainment of a "perpetual peace" for the fulfillment of nuclear disarmament. Every epoch of international life, even the most seemingly peaceful, contains risks and uncertainties.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The concrete proposal to establish a nuclear weapons free zone in Latin America came from Chancellor Afonso Arinos de Melo Franco, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Brazil. Its formalization took place in November 1961 at the United Nations General Assembly, at the height of the Cuban missile crisis.

Six years later, with the active engagement of Brazilian diplomacy, it was possible to conclude the negotiations for the Treaty of Tlatelolco, which established the first nuclear weapons free zone in a densely populated region. From the Latin American and Caribbean pioneering efforts derived five nuclear weapons free zones, comprising today 114 states.

The Treaty of Tlatelolco made a significant contribution to the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons. The recent celebration of its fiftieth anniversary, without any breach of its provisions by any of its member states, confirms the commitment of Latin America and the Caribbean to international peace and to the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As a South American country, the promotion of regional integration is a main priority of our foreign policy. This goal, in turn, can only be achieved through confidence building and the reduction of divergences between the countries of the region.

This was exactly what moved Brazil and Argentina to establish the Brazilian-Argentine Agency for Accounting and Control of Nuclear

Material- ABACC - 25 years ago. Indeed, it was the realization of a shared vision on an area of great sensitivity that allowed the extension of bilateral cooperation to other areas. Without ABACC it would have been very difficult, if not impossible, to bring about the conditions that led to the creation of Mercosur.

Let me emphasize that ABACC's conception should by no means be taken for granted. The bilateral relations have not always been at the level of excellence observed in recent decades. Brazil and Argentina could have chosen the logic of competition and of distrust, such as is often done by countries in the midst of some current regional and international tensions. They preferred, instead, the path of cooperation, of transparency, and of shared responsibility. ABACC opened up a new threshold in the building of mutual trust.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Brazil has followed, with great apprehension, the escalation of tensions in the Korean peninsula. We have urged the parties at all times to avoid actions with a destabilizing potential and to pursue the path of dialogue and understanding.

We have condemned, in the strongest terms, the conduct of nuclear tests by the People's Democratic Republic of Korea. We also associated ourselves with the vast majority of the international community in repudiating North Korea's missile and nuclear tests for violating United Nations Security Council resolutions.

From a broader perspective, the crisis on the Korean peninsula raises, however, the question of why the international community has failed to create enough incentives for North Korea to abandon its military nuclear program.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The building of peace allows for no discontinuities. It is a process. Unlike the old Latin proverb, whoever wants peace must prepare for peace, not war. *Si vis pacem, para pacem*. This is the way to a world free of nuclear weapons.

Let my last words be of gratitude to all those responsible for this event. I would like to single out, in particular, FUNAG, the Department of International Organizations, the Disarmament and Sensitive Technologies Division, the partner institutions - the Getúlio Vargas Foundation, the

Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace - and the Austrian Embassy in Brasilia.

I wish you all a productive and fruitful seminar.

Thank you.