



LALN

Latin American and Caribbean Leadership Network
for Nuclear Disarmament and Nonproliferation

Statement

Latin American Leadership Network for Nuclear Disarmament and Nonproliferation

Time for Nuclear Disarmament October 2013

On October 14 Syria joined the Chemical Weapons Convention as a state party, which means that in the future it must not develop, produce, acquire, stockpile or use such weapons and that it must under international supervision destroy all of its arsenals and production facilities.

The path to the reduction of chemical risks in the Middle East has been opened thanks to the cooperation of the leaders of the United States and Russia, as well as of many others who rejected the use of direct action outside the mandate of the United Nations Security Council. These leaders exhausted all means available to them to search for a peaceful process resulting in greater protection of the civilian population in Syria.

The OPCW, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, which on October 11 was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for its consistent efforts to eliminate chemical weapons in the world, will be responsible for monitoring compliance with the commitments made.

We, as members of the Latin American and Caribbean Leadership Network for Nuclear Disarmament and Nonproliferation, express our satisfaction with the decision taken by the Syrian government to adhere to the Chemical Weapons Convention as well as with the award given to the OPCW. We also congratulate the Organization and its staff for consistently working to achieve their lofty objective, since the organization was founded in 1997.

In this context we respectfully but firmly urge Angola, North Korea, Egypt and South Sudan to sign and ratify the Convention, and Israel and Myanmar to ratify it. In the same way, we urge those states that have not yet concluded with the destruction of their chemical weapons stockpiles to accelerate this task.

During the past few months, the world had the chance to take into account the devastating effects of the indiscriminate use of chemical agents in Syria, which cost thousands of lives. Images of Aleppo and Ghouta still shock us in the same way that those of the 1988's chemical attack in Halabja, part of the Iranian Kurdistan, where 5,000 civilians died and tens of thousands suffered lasting injuries. This time the international community has taken decisive action to reduce the risk of similar events occurring in the future.

However, we all face a threat that is much greater: the indescribable and disastrous humanitarian consequences that would result from the use of a nuclear weapon, either sophisticated or improvised, detonated by a state or a terrorist group, anywhere in the world.

If the worst-case scenario, hundreds of thousands of people would lose their lives and many others would suffer irreversible harm. The political, economic and social consequences would be, without doubt, global in scope.

If the world has managed to reach an international agreement for the elimination of chemical weapons, it should also be able to reach one that bans nuclear weapons, gradually eliminating them from the face of the earth.

Achieving this international agreement will not be easy, but it is possible. The nine states that possess nuclear weapons remain reluctant to get rid of them. The myth persists that these states can keep the arms totally under lock and key and therefore, that no theft, accident or mistake will ever lead to a tragic situation. But above all, the states continue to rely on the deterrence capability of such weapons, and remain confident that the central role that nuclear arms play in national security doctrines will always assure them a place of power in the global context.

Nevertheless, reality has repeatedly demonstrated the fragility of these arguments. Many wars have been fought and the mere possession of nuclear weapons has not been in any way sufficient to sway the outcome of the disputes.

In some instances, uncontrolled nuclear war has been averted only by the wisdom of a few individuals. Meanwhile, in the shadows, terrorists of different allegiances have both indicated their intention to, and taken action to, obtain the materials required to manufacture a nuclear weapon, until now without result.

Humankind has been very lucky so far but, how long will this last?

The question is whether we will have to wait for a catastrophic event of planetary consequences to occur in order for leaders to correctly decide to accelerate nuclear disarmament and take action to totally secure all nuclear weapons-usable materials.

In this sense, the vision of this Leadership Network is that this task should be performed as soon as possible. Nuclear disarmament is not solely the responsibility of the nuclear-armed states. States that do not possess nor wish to possess nuclear weapons, can and must exercise influence to accelerate the pace of activity toward their total elimination.

We believe that, to achieve this goal in the current circumstances, innovative strategies and actions are required to open multiple new pathways to across-the-board multilateral negotiations. We also recognize the role that public opinion must play in each nation to assure that government leaders include this fundamental issue in their list of priorities.

As such, the Network urges world leaders to build on the international cooperation for peace that has been demonstrated in addressing the crisis in Syria, and to define strategies for the total elimination of nuclear weapons, and of all weapons of mass destruction. Similarly, the Network calls on non-governmental organizations and the public to increase their commitment to this cause, and to work in common with governments to generate the conditions required for such elimination.

The Latin American and the Caribbean Leadership Network is profoundly convinced that the complete, verifiable and irreversible nuclear disarmament is possible, and that immediate and responsible action in this direction is needed, carried out on a basis of respect for the international community.

It is time to build globally new leaderships and a strong political will to firmly take the difficult but essential steps toward a world without nuclear weapons.

Released on October 18, 2013

[Signed]

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