

AN ON-GOING THREAT

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For most people, nuclear weapons and the dreadful threat they represent are issues of the past. They evoke Cold War times when the discussion dwelt on the concept of Mutually Assured Destruction, in the eventuality of conflict between the two dominant nuclear powers: The United States and the former Soviet Union. Today, more than two decades after the end of the Cold War, the odds of a nuclear conflict seem, to the eye of the common observer, certainly slim or non-existent.

Yet, how to explain that worldwide over 17 thousand nuclear weapons exist, out of which over 16 thousand are in the hands of just the U.S. and Russia? How to explain that nearly two thousand nuclear weapons are in state of “high operational alert”, ready to be launched in a matter of 10 to 15 minutes once the determination of a “potential threat” is called? What assurances do we have that these weapons are slumbering safely and that no real risk of a nuclear detonation –be it accidental or intentional– or falling into the wrong hands is guaranteed?

The sole existence of nuclear weapons and their continued development and modernization by those States that possess them represents a threat for humanity in its entirety. The possibility of a nuclear detonation will always be present as long as those weapons exist, even more so given the large number of arsenals plus the scarce information available warning on the safety conditions that need to be met for their storage.

What does all this mean for Mexico? The first time nuclear weapons were used Mexico immediately grasped the complexities of the new reality: We understood that humanity was being faced with armament with and indescribable capacity for destruction. Ever since that moment, Mexico has firmly advocated for their total elimination and it promoted the establishment of the first Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in a densely populated area, through the adoption of the Treaty of Tlatelolco. This successful achievement earned Mexico’s most prestigious diplomat, Alfonso García Robles to be bestowed with the Nobel Peace Prize. Today, every Latin America and Caribbean country is part of this Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone, and Tlatelolco set the paradigm that led to the establishment of five additional zones around the globe.

However, the banning of these weapons in our territory is simply not enough to free ourselves from the nuclear threat. We must determine and acknowledge whether we are prepared to face a nuclear explosion taking place beyond our borders. We must assess the immediate and devastating humanitarian impact that such an event would have –, including the medium term impact—on a plethora of aspects ranging from health, the environment, migration to the global economy, just to name a few.

The explosion of a hundred nuclear weapons similar to the ones used in Hiroshima in 1945 –with a much less inferior power than today’s arms-, would automatically cause millions of deaths plus an enormous radiation cloud with the potential to block around 7% to 10% of the earth’s sunlight for at least a decade. This means that the concerns of a nuclear explosion should not only belong to those possessing the arms or those likely to emerge as targets of an attack. But the concerns regarding the consequences of a nuclear explosion and the need to tackle them from a preventive approach should be shared by all the global community. Given their global scope, the existence of nuclear weapons and the humanitarian impact that a detonation would entail are a collective responsibility. It is indeed, a global, mutual and shared concern.

Espousing this global responsibility and aiming at studying the harm and effects that these weapons can produce, on February 13-14, Mexico will host the Second International Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, which will take place in Nuevo Vallarta, Nayarit. The Conference will build upon the discussions that kicked off in Oslo, Norway, in March 2013. We are confident that this dialogue will contribute to increase global awareness with respect to the grave danger that these weapons represent in the 21st Century.

All United Nations member and observer States are invited, together with experts on public health, humanitarian assistance, environment, civil protection, development and food security, coming from international organizations, academia and civil society.

Lessons learned from the use of nuclear weapons in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as the thousand nuclear tests that have been carried out –the last one conducted in 2013 by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea-, show their capacity to devastate nature and all that has been created by the human race; to severely harm global health and not only the health of those directly affected; to hamper the economic development of nations by destroying vital infrastructure and means of production and communications; to aggravate climate change and environmental damage; and to negatively impact the food chain provision triggering a massive displacement of entire populations.

Thousands of nuclear weapons are set and ready to be used in minutes and the risk of an accident cannot be put aside or ignored. Are we ready to manage such a terrifying challenge? The world’s security depends on it. Our *rendez-vous* is in Nayarit; México.

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