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**REMARKS TO THE EXTRAORDINARY SESSION
OF OPANAL, THE AGENCY
FOR THE PROHIBITION
OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS
IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN
Mexico City, 4 August 2008**

Buenos días. I am honored at this opportunity to address the Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean. Let me offer my special thanks to the Government of Mexico and to the OPANAL Secretariat for organizing this timely event.

It has been almost 40 years since my predecessor, U Thant, attended the first session of OPANAL's General Conference in this regard I feel honored to be the second Secretary General. Today, I want to show my profound respect for your work and to highlight the urgent need to make further progress on multilateral nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

We meet just before the 63rd anniversary of the Hiroshima bombing, and as preparations continue for the 40th anniversary celebrations next year of the Treaty of Tlatelolco. This is a fitting moment to reinforce the call for strengthened efforts to prevent nuclear proliferation and to advance nuclear disarmament. And this extraordinary session of OPANAL is a most appropriate platform to do so.

Regional approaches to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation have a long and distinguished history. The Antarctic Treaty and the Outer Space Treaty broke new ground by designating vast geographic areas for peaceful uses only. The Tlatelolco Treaty established the world's first nuclear-weapon-free zone in a populated area and inspired similar zones in the South Pacific, Southeast Asia, Africa, and Central Asia.

Today, the regional or territorial approach to disarmament covers most of our planet. Virtually the entire Southern Hemisphere is now nuclear-weapons free. This progress has been remarkable.

Many of the advances at the regional level are due to the work of Alfonso García Robles -- who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1982 -- and the tireless efforts of the Government of Mexico in support of global nuclear disarmament.

Yet we cannot afford to be complacent. While two thirds of the world's States are signatories to nuclear-weapon-free zone treaties, the majority of the world's population still lives in countries that possess nuclear weapons.

And international efforts to prevent nuclear proliferation and achieve nuclear disarmament continue to face significant challenges. Some of the nuclear-weapon-free zone treaties have not yet entered into force. Several signatories have yet to complete the ratification or accession process. Others have not brought the required IAEA safeguards agreements into force. Elsewhere, whole regions have been unable to establish such zones, including the Middle East. And some nuclear-weapon states have not concluded the relevant Protocols. Clearly, there is still much work to do before we achieve our shared goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world.

The entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty would help to prevent the upgrading of nuclear weapons. And the negotiation of a fissile material treaty in the Conference on Disarmament would contribute to forestalling any further expansion of existing arsenals.

Both initiatives would reinforce the global nuclear non-proliferation regime. I therefore urge greater political support for the Conference on Disarmament as a crucial prerequisite to achieve these aims.

In the meantime, international non-proliferation and disarmament efforts will continue to face challenges. The nuclear test by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in 2006 was a particularly severe setback for the non-proliferation regime. The world eagerly awaits full implementation of the DPRK's commitments to disable its nuclear programme.

A welcome step was taken last month when the Six-Party Talks agreed to establish mechanisms to verify the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and to monitor the implementation of related commitments. I encourage the countries concerned to make further progress. As Secretary-General of the United Nations, I stand ready to assist in any way I can to help achieve the goal of a nuclear-free Korean peninsula.

On the Iranian nuclear issue, I am concerned about the continued absence of a resolution. It can and must be resolved by peaceful means. I encourage all parties to follow up on the recent round of talks in Geneva, with a view to reaching an early resolution of this issue in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

Excellencies,

Four decades after the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty was opened for signature, an estimated 26,000 nuclear weapons reportedly remain in the world. It is obvious that we must make greater progress globally on nuclear disarmament to bring this figure down.

But progress in nuclear disarmament is not an end in itself -- it will also help to significantly reduce the risks of both nuclear proliferation and terrorism. After all, realistically,

nuclear disarmament can occur only in parallel with strict, iron-clad controls to prevent non-compliance. The UN General Assembly and states parties to the NPT have repeatedly argued that disarmament must include standards of transparency, verification, irreversibility, and that they must be legally binding.

Accordingly, it is crucial to implement and build on the key components of the NPT in tandem -- they are all part and parcel of the same universally agreed goal: a world without nuclear weapons. The 2010 NPT Review Conference is a critical occasion for us all to contribute towards robust, creative responses to the challenges facing the Treaty and to reaffirm our commitment to the grand bargain embodied in it. I encourage all States to seize that opportunity.

Of course, the prospects for achieving the twin goals of general and complete nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation hinge on the international security environment. But we cannot wait for a perfect security environment to come along. Rather, I believe that the process of moving forward in disarmament, non-proliferation, and against terrorist uses of weapons of mass destruction will itself contribute to international peace and security.

It is clear that disarmament and non-proliferation are of vital importance in shaping international peace and security. But we must not lose sight of their close connections to our development efforts. Today, countries around the world spend some 1.3 trillion dollars on their militaries and on arms. We could make significant progress towards the Millennium Development Goals if some of these resources were redirected to economic and social development efforts. At a time of soaring food and fuel prices and global economic uncertainty, the world cannot afford to ignore the development potential of disarmament and non-proliferation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Multilateral cooperation remains absolutely indispensable to moving forward on disarmament and non-proliferation. OPANAL is an important partner in these collective efforts to free the world of nuclear dangers and I applaud your determination to do more to advance this vital aim.

I urge all members of OPANAL to continue to demonstrate their leadership and their efforts, and I call on you to work with members of other nuclear-weapon-free zones to promote nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation and to reduce the risk of nuclear terrorism.

For my part, I look forward to cooperating closely with OPANAL on the range of issues before you as together we pursue the goal of a safe and prosperous world for all of humanity. In this spirit please accept my best wishes for a successful session.

Muchas gracias.