

"I remember the awful difficulties U Thant had in pronouncing it. I spent several sessions trying to help him. I urged him to pronounce it by syllables, Tlat-el-ol-co, and we practised that for a few minutes until he had it right. But when he came to refer to it in a speech (which he often did, as he regarded the treaty as a 'beacon light' and as a great achievement by the smaller powers without any assistance from the nuclear powers), he invariably stumbled and got it all twisted up. But he was very proud that the Latin Americans had produced it by their own efforts and with only modest help from the UN Secretariat. No other populated region of the world has succeeded in creating a nuclear-free zone.

"My conclusion after all these years with the UN is that, during periods of détente and relaxation of tensions, the nations can make lots of agreements, and these have a kind of snowball and feedback effect to promote détente and more agreements. From my point of view, the Non-Proliferation Treaty, on which I worked very hard, and the Treaty of Tlatelolco were the high points, and I also helped get the Seabed Treaty and the Biological Weapons Convention. At the same time in 1972—I was still there, and keeping U Thant informed—the superpowers made a good deal in the SALT-I Treaty. Another thing that I regard as a highlight (I was still in the Secretariat and working in the field with UNITAR [United Nations Institute for Training and Research] and also was a Special Adviser in the Canadian delegation) was the Final Document of the first Special Session on Disarmament in 1978. It was merely a declaration, but it was still a tremendous achievement. That was the highwater mark; after that things started to disintegrate.

"The last treaty that was ratified in the nuclear field was the 1972 SALT-I Treaty. There were 8 multilateral and 13 bilateral arms control treaties in those years. Three American-Soviet bilateral treaties in the nuclear field—the Threshold Test Ban in 1974, the Peaceful Nuclear Explosion Treaty in 1976 and the SALT-II Treaty in 1979—were never ratified by the Americans. And the superpowers haven't signed any bilateral or multilateral nuclear treaty since SALT-II. Yes, I was lucky: I was in charge of disarmament in the UN Secretariat during the good years—the golden years.... I'm not alone in worrying about whether we'll ever see their like again...."