

A PEACE WITH ALL FORMS OF LIFE

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Mr. Secretary General, Dear Friends:

In the famous congress of nations held by Simon Bolívar in Panama in 1826, undeniable precedent to this Organization of American States, the nations of the continent signed a treaty where they stated that they aspired "to ensure themselves from now and forever the enjoyment of an unalterable peace."

With such a marvelous promise, it is hard to understand how it was that such bloody civil wars followed and shaped the development of our modern States gambling America's destiny in the field of battle. And it is even harder to understand how the XX Century witnessed the most inhumane trail of violence and repression in Latin America, when dictatorships dimmed hopes and tyrants held by force the governments they acquired with weapons.

Had Tolstoy had to write *War and Peace* in America, he would still be writing the memoirs of every caudillo who ever raised a flag in our land, a stage for the noblest of ideals but also for the most entrenched violence. Not even one hundred years of solitude would have been enough to count the trails of blood that carved our continent in the almost two centuries since our independence.

We were the region that came to life as a promise of peace, justice and liberty and we are still that grand historical experiment. But it took us too long to understand that peace is more than the absence of war and that strengthening our democracies and the human development of our people, based on the dialogue among nations, diplomacy and international law, are the best avenues to ensure, at last, the enjoyment of an unalterable peace.

I trust that we have come to this forum with that conviction. I trust that we were brought together here by the belief that organizations such as this are already a triumph of hope over fear, of tolerance over fanaticism, of reason over force. I, above all, trust that it is no coincidence that this forum is being inaugurated by an inhabitant of the first nation in history to abolish its army and to declare peace to the world. If Costa Rica is a symbol at all, it is precisely a symbol that there is no destiny of violence foretold for us in the stars. Life based on democracy, justice and liberty, is possible for those nations that dare to pursue it, for those nations that dare to base their security on the strength of their institutions and not on the strength of their armament.

A life dedicated to the search for peace has taught me that, in fact, there is no fantasy, or naivety or idealism in it. Peace is not a dream but hard work, and it is not a path taken because it is easy but because it is necessary. The current situation in Colombia and the conflicts that have become direr in the Middle East, in Georgia and in the Sudan demonstrate that reconciliation is a profound and difficult process, a process that requires years of work, a process that presumes adversity and demands perseverance. In order to trust in peace it is not necessary to believe that negotiations are infallible. We know that parties are often intransigent, that leaders often do not fulfill their obligations and responsibilities, and that some may even make peace

negotiations more difficult. Despite these difficulties, it is obvious that the alternative is even worse. I can't recount the number of times that we were asked to give up in the peace process in Central America. I cannot recount the times that frustration overtook us. We stumbled and we went backwards, and we knocked on thousands of closed doors. But we did not give up. That was the difference. On the one thousandth and one try, the doors opened.

There are no sacred formulas or philosophical stones for this that we have called "*Peace in the Americas.*" There are simply signs. There are actions that tend to weaken our peace and there are actions that tend to strengthen it. Human development and democracy strengthen peace; the accumulation of arms and public insecurity weaken it.

You may say that these things are obvious, but I don't know how obvious they are when, last year, our continent spent five hundred and ninety-eight billion dollars in troops and armament, of which thirty-nine billion, seven hundred million dollars were spent by Latin America, a region that, except for Colombia, is not engaged in any armed conflict. With the money that Latin America spends in its armies in one year we could pay for universal elementary education around the world and have money left over; we could meet all the Millennium Development Objectives in terms of health and the environment; or we could provide eight million credits for affordable housing.

But even if we accept the fact that Latin American nations cannot eliminate with one swift stroke their military spending, it is clear that there are certain expenditures that could be reduced gradually and progressively. If, for example, we didn't invest in one F-16 jet fighter, whose cost hovers around eighty million dollars, -and there are tens of them in our region -, we would have enough money to provide a one hundred dollar-a-month scholarship to five thousand Latin American children and adolescents from kindergarten until they graduate from high school; it would be enough money to increase the salaries of eight thousand Latin American teachers by one thousand dollars a year for the next ten years. One single plane cannot make that much difference in terms of security, but how different our region would be with thousands of more students!

There is, at the end of all this, a moral question. The developed nations and the international financial organizations cannot reward with economic resources and foreign debt forgiveness those nations that choose to arm their troops rather than educate their children. If we are to begin a serious and responsible debate about establishing a lasting peace in the Americas, we must begin by showing the developing nations, whether they are poor or middle income nations, that the international community knows the difference between those who invest in life and those who invest in death, between those who aim for higher human development and those who are satisfied with higher military development.

It is for this reason that my government has introduced the Costa Rica Consensus, an initiative that aims to create mechanisms to forgive debt and to provide international financial support to those developing nations that continue to invest more and more in protecting the environment, education, health and housing for their people and less and less in weapons and troops. I am convinced that it will bring us more security and peace than all the money that we currently dedicate to our armies.

And I am convinced of it for a simple reason: for many years now peace in Latin America has been, above all, a domestic matter. Our insecurity does not come, for the most part, from foreign countries or enemy armies but from the street warfare waged in our neighborhoods and in our cities. Not long ago the UNDP informed us that Latin America spends 14% of its Gross Domestic Product to combat citizen insecurity, an

expenditure that must certainly be a serious obstacle to achieving higher development. Our region must dedicate resources to combat delinquency, but, above all, it must dedicate those resources to combat the causes of delinquency.

Those causes are fought with more schools, more clinics and hospitals, more housing and recreations centers, more cultural activities and sports. But they are also fought by stemming the proliferation of small arms and light weapons that constitute the driving force of our public insecurity. I do not know how much longer we will be able to survive without realizing that killing many people, a few at the time, each day, is as condemnable as killing many people in just one day. The power of destruction in the 640 million small arms and light weapons in existence around the world, the vast majority of them in the hands of civilians, has proven to be more lethal than nuclear bombs but it takes place in a permissive environment lacking in regulation .

Forty-two percent of the homicides committed with firearms around the world are committed in Latin America where only 8% of the world population lives. We, more than anyone else, are interested in supporting a project that Costa Rica has introduced in the United Nations, A Treaty on the Transfer of Arms, which prohibits countries from transferring arms to states, groups or individuals when there is sufficient reason to believe that they will be used to violate human rights or international law. Neither terrorist groups, nor drug trafficking cartels, nor street gangs would have any power without the power of their firearms. It is clear that approving this treaty will not make those groups disappear but that is no reason to make matters easier for them.

The last topic I wanted to talk to you about also has to do with peace although , often, we do not understand it. More than a few scientists have predicted that the wars of the future will not be about controlling territory or wealth but about access to natural resources. It could be that tomorrow, drinking water would generate more conflicts than oil. There is no war deadlier than the war for survival when facing scarce resources and although the world has not reached that point yet, that time will come if we don't do something to prevent it.

More than five hundred years ago Christopher Columbus described America in these terms: *"the land is high and there are many sierras and very high mountains, ... and it is full of trees of a thousand shapes and they seem to reach the sky; and they tell me that their leaves never fall, as I understand it, and I saw them as green and pretty as they are in Spain in May, and they flowered, and bore fruit, and on them, depending on their type; the nightingale sang and so did other birds in a thousand ways in the month of November there, where I was"*. That image that Columbus had gets blurrier each day with the trees we cut down, with the carbon dioxide that we emit and with the rivers and oceans that we contaminate. Even though it is considered Earth's Eden, so far in the XXI Century Latin America has been responsible for two thirds of the loss of all forest cover. Today more than ever, Peace in the Americas depends on our ability to declare Peace with Nature.

That is the name Costa Rica has given to an initiative to protect the environment and to combat global warming. We have pledged to become a neutral country on carbon emissions by the year 2021. Last year, after planting 5 million trees, we became the country with the most trees per capita and per square kilometer in the world. In 2008, we will plant another 7 million trees. We seek international support to protect the primary forest and we lead an international crusade of countries committed to these causes. Today, I ask you to join us in the most global of peace treaties; a peace with all forms of life.

Dear Friends:

The process of enlightenment of the best ideals of humanity is not immune from the pains of birth. Perhaps the suffering from all the wars our continent has witnessed is the price we have paid to understand certain things. The utopia of America, of which this organization is its most visible symbol, has been strengthened by the lessons of our history, by the experiences that, in the end, have taught us that one does not achieve peace through arms or war, death or hate, nor through forgetfulness or indifference. Peace is achieved by placing human beings at the center. Peace is achieved by defending life. Peace is achieved by investing in our people and not in our armies; exchanging ideas and not weapons; preserving forests not biases.

I hope that this forum will understand these principles and will be able to take our world a step closer to that future that Rafael Alberti described in these words: *"Peace in all abodes. Peace on earth, in the sky, under the sea, over the seas. Peace on the extended height of the tablecloth, peace on the table without the frown of food. In birds, in flowers, in fish, in the open furrows of labor. Peace at dawn, in sleep. Peace in the passion of the adult and the illusion of the young. Peace with no end, true peace. Peace that will get up at daybreak and won't die at night."*

Thank you and good luck.