

PEACE IS POSSIBLE ONLY THROUGH MEMORY

(Check against delivery.)

Mr. President:

I received the news of your election as President of the United Nations General Assembly with a brother's pride. Twenty-one years ago, it was war in Central America that brought us together. Today, it is peace that allows us to meet once more. In the name of the people of Costa Rica, and in my own name as well, I am honored to extend to you a brotherly Central American greeting.

Mr. President:

I have come here to speak words of urgency - the urgency any leader feels at critical moments in history. This is not just any year. While we celebrate this General Assembly, millions of people who used to be able to cover their basic needs have seen the face of poverty once again. Hunger, that abominable monster that we had escaped for so many years, has returned to chase away the dreams of humanity. Pessimism and hopelessness have taken control of our economies, and, as always, the poorest among us will pay the consequences. World military spending has reached \$3.3 billion per day, but international aid continues to reach the poorest countries at a snail's pace, while failing to reach middle-income countries altogether. Brutal hurricanes and intense droughts remind us that the planet reacts to our irrationality, and the time that remains for us may be a countdown to disaster if we do not make a change.

It may be that in no other General Assembly have more global issues been discussed. Our interdependence has made us all vulnerable - but that interdependence is also our strength. In the past, a nation could avert its gaze from far-off suffering, and scorn the pain of others. Today, that option does not exist. Every victory is shared, and so is every failure. The man who, motivated by hunger, cuts down a tree in the virgin Amazon rainforest, unwittingly deprives of us a fraction of the air we breathe in this room. The European mother who is forced to buy less food because she can't afford the costs, unwittingly affects the economy of all nations in the world. The African child who drops out of school because of a lack of resources, unwittingly determines the future performance of our species. We are all united, and perhaps for the first time in history, no one can look away. We are all seated at the prosecutor's bench and at the defense table, in the public gallery and at the judge's chair. We must take advantage of this moment, in which the equality among nations is manifested in the equality of our challenges.

We will not be able to face our realities unless we understand them completely. We will not be able to shine the light of reason upon our Earth if we intentionally leave

some regions in the shadow. If we have seriously assumed the challenges of our time, it is fair that, like the old protagonist of the Charles Dickens story, we open our eyes to our past, our present and our future; we must guarantee peace and justice for the past, peace and development for the present, peace and nature for the future.

In the Preamble to the U.N. Charter, the States that integrate this organization have committed to *create conditions under which justice can be maintained*. Of those conditions, perhaps the most important is will: the will to demand that obligations are fulfilled; the will to raise one's voice when International Law is violated; and, above all, the will to ensure that acts that are an affront to all humankind, do not go unnoticed.

Evil lives not only through actions, but also, and above all, through omission. To keep silent, when crimes are grave and responsibilities are clear, is not to remain neutral – it is to take a stand on the side of the aggressors. Our recent past holds unpunished and horrendous crimes that call out, not for vengeance, but for justice. We cannot trivialize evil. If we do not want to repeat the painful history of Kosovo and Bosnia, of Rwanda and Kampuchea, then it is time for the international community to demand that those responsible for the crimes committed in Darfur be judged before the International Criminal Court. Costa Rica will oppose any attempt to avoid this path, which is the path of peace. Forgiveness is based on memory, not in concealment; and peace will be possible only through memory. We must understand, through the words of Elie Wiesel, that "*the memory of evil will serve as a shield against evil; the memory of death will serve as a shield against death.*"

If the spirit of the past calls on us to hold people responsible for the violation of human rights, the spirit of the present calls on us to ensure that those rights are fulfilled today. Governments can indirectly hurt their peoples in many ways, one of which is excessive military spending. Particularly in developing nations, every long-range missile, every helicopter gunship, every tank, is a symbol of postponed attention to the needs of our people.

On a planet where one-sixth of the population lives on less than a dollar a day, spending \$1.2 trillion on arms and soldiers is an offense and a symbol of irrationality, because the security of a satisfied world is more certain than the security of an armed world. Latin America does not escape this phenomenon. Last year, Latin American military spending reached \$39 billion, in a region that has never been more peaceful or more democratic.

I know no greater perversion of values, and no greater misplacement of priorities. With a small percentage of world military spending, we could give potable water to all of humanity, equip all homes with electricity, achieve universal literacy, and eradicate all preventable diseases. I'm not talking about the utopia of a world

without armies. Unfortunately, that is an idea whose time has not yet come. I am talking about tiny percentages of an expenditure that could be reduced without damaging countries' ability to defend themselves – particularly developing countries.

That's why my government has presented the Costa Rica Consensus, an initiative that would create mechanisms to forgive debts and use international financial resources to support developing nations that spend more on environmental protections, education, health care and housing for their people, and less on arms and soldiers. I am convinced that this will bring us greater development, greater security and greater peace than all the money we now set aside for our armies. I humbly ask you today to support this initiative.

I also ask for your support for the Arms Trade Treaty that Costa Rica is pushing forward in the heart of this organization, to prohibit the transfer of arms to States, groups or individuals if sufficient reason exists to believe that those arms will be used to violate human rights or International Law. The destructive power of the 640 million small arms and light weapons that exist in the world, most in the hands of civilians, deserves the same or even more attention than military spending.

However, no matter how urgent it may be to ensure the present development of our peoples, it is equally important to ensure their future development. The spirit of the future, if we continue on our present course, shows us a desolate image. Imagine an unending desert, a cracked ground too hot to stand on. Imagine a planet where life has been displaced and only cockroaches, if anything, can survive. Imagine a world whose palette of colors, at one point infinite, is reduced to grays and dark browns. Imagine polluted air, impossible to breath.

"Esto no es un mal plagio del delirio de Juan en su destierro de Patmos" [*"This is not plagiarism of John's delirium during his exile on Patmos"*], as Gabriel García Márquez once said. I am not describing the Apocalypse, but, simply, the world that awaits us if we do not take action right away to declare "Peace with Nature."

Sixty years ago, an illustrious Costa Rican, José Figueres, abolished my country's army. What had been the General Fortress of the Costa Rican armed forces is today a National Museum. Our children have never seen a column of soldiers on the march; they know only the march of columns of ants. No Costa Rican children know the different between this or that missile, between this or that combat plane, but they can distinguish among the trees of the forest and the animals of the sea; they know the importance of the water cycle, of wind energy, of rivers and of the sun. Ours is a nation of peace among humans, but we also aspire to be a nation of peace with all forms of life.

We have set a goal of becoming carbon-neutral by the year 2021. Last year, we became the world leader for number of trees per capita and square kilometer, planting five million trees. In 2008 we will plant seven million more. We are leading an international crusade against global warming and environmental destruction, with a special focus on the planet's primary forests. Today, I ask you to join us.

Mr. President:

Humans' march through history is neither linear nor continuous. It has detours and pitfalls. It has painful setbacks. As in Pedro Calderón de la Barca's famous play, one morning we awake as princes, and the next we are nothing more than beggars. But not everything in life is a dream. There are concrete realities that we have been able to build. There are indisputable achievements in the history of man. This organization is one of them. You may tell me that the United Nations is founded on the search for peace, understanding among peoples, respect for International Law. That is all true. But I dare to say that, more than anything else, this organization is founded on hope: the hope that our march is ascending, that our future will be better, that a promised land lies across the deserts of violence and injustice that, with courage, we have been able to cross.

I assure you that if we confront the spirit of our past, our present and our future; if we build peace on a base of justice, development and nature; if we reject oblivion, armaments and environmental destruction; we will reach that promised land some day, and our children, and our children's children, will never again be beggars in the kingdom of their dreams.

Thank you very much.