

## Long-term Benefits of Demilitarization in Costa Rica

### Introduction.

It is my great honor to address such distinguished audience at this institution that embraces such noble purpose as the promotion of international peace among nations of the world. I would like to thank Sasakawa Peace Foundation and most particularly their Executive Director, Junko Chano-san, for her invitation to participate in this event and share with you some thoughts about my country's efforts to promote international peace.

In an effort to present a case for international peace from the Costa Rican approach, I would like to comment a very brief history of Costa Rica's demilitarization, illustrating the value proposition of what this means to us as a nation and what it represents to the world. Also, I would like to exemplify some benefits of this decision and present some challenges that lie ahead for the international community in terms of peace and disarmament, and conclude with some final considerations of what demilitarization means for international peace in the world we live in today.

First, I would like to elaborate on the concept of violence and peace. The Jainist religion from India defines violence as anything that alters harmony. Then, there are several forms of violence, from the direct physical violence of a homicide, to the structural violence of contamination of air and water, which ultimately affects both human and non-human life on the planet.

I would catalogue military spending as indirect violence for two reasons: first, because it represents an imminent threat to human life as the institutionalized power of violent force; and second, because the opportunity cost of spending in arms and weaponry implies that such funds cannot be spent in other more virtuous expenses, such as education, healthcare or environmental conservation.

Johan Galtung, a Norwegian peace philosopher, defines peace as "the ability to transform conflicts creatively, empathically and harmoniously." This means, to think about solutions to human incompatibilities in a way that generates innovative ideas that keep us moving along the path to prosperity; always keeping the other in mind when thinking about the consequences of my behaviors and decisions; and, most importantly, to do so without violence, not inflicting damage or pain or loss to the other.

In that regard, the abolishment of a military army is a virtuous and civilized political decision towards a more peaceful coexistence between human beings towards a more prosperous future for all.

#### I. Abolishing the army: a brief history.

In 1948, Costa Rica was the scenario of a sociopolitical unrest that originated from an allegedly fraudulent electoral process. This led to a confrontation that became violent and both parties resorted to weapons to fight for what they considered their legitimate right.

A man by the name José Figueres Ferrer became the leader of the national liberation army, which was a paramilitary army of 700 men, some of which were foreigners from neighboring Latin American countries. This contingent was poorly armed and trained, but in 44 days

managed to defeat the national state army and instate what became known as the Founding Junta of the Second Republic. During 18 months, Figueres Ferrer himself led a process through which Costa Rica issued a new Constitution including some paramount reforms that have shaped the country's idiosyncrasy ever since.

One of these reforms was the permanent abolishment of the state military army.

History offers a particular view about this event within the circumstantial perspective of the time. As it has been stated before, this was a weak, poorly armed military body. Abolishing it did not imply a particularly large political cost. There was not going to be much opposition to the decision, especially after being defeated by a group of poorly trained and armed men.

It is said that Figueres Ferrer inspired his decision on a quote from H.G. Wells's book "The Outline of History", which says that "*the future of mankind cannot include armed forces. Police yes, because people are imperfect.*" He aimed at creating a society that would reach a higher level of civilization in which conflicts would never be dealt with through the violence of firearms.

## II. A value proposition.

This historical decision has had profound repercussions domestically as well as abroad. For once, all nations around the world, most particularly our immediate neighboring countries of Nicaragua and Panama, have the certainty that Costa Rica will never resort to military power as a way to solve conflicts across borders.

Perhaps the most tangible example of this reality is the present border conflict that Costa Rica and Nicaragua are facing since October of 2010. An occupation of Nicaraguan military troops into Costa Rican territory triggered an international campaign by Costa Rican diplomacy both to legitimize its right to vindicate its sovereignty and territorial claim, as well as to take action at the corresponding international court of justice at The Hague as its fundamental defense strategy.

Would Costa Rica had an army, it is likely to imagine that it would have been deployed to fight the aggression by force. Although there were some isolated cries for militarization in the wake of this conflict, no one in Costa Rica dares to suggest the name and location of the first soldier we would choose to see perish in combat. As Ryoichi Sasakawa once said, "Blessed is the Costa Rican mother, who knows at the time of birth that her child will never be a soldier."

In 1948, the world, most particularly Europe and Japan, had learned the hard way that war was never the way towards prosperity. The lesson was well learned, and it is no coincidence that today both the European as well as the Japanese nations are among the most prosperous in the world. These cultures understood the principles of peaceful coexistence and have embraced them ever since.

Figueres Ferrer had been very studious of European models of human development. World War II had a profound effect on him and made clear to him that the path towards development could not include military power in the equation.

## III. Some benefits.

Looking back at Latin American history, one notorious difference between Costa Rica and many of its neighbors is that there has never been a military intervention in political or state affairs. If a foreign power would have wanted to infiltrate the military to influence political leadership in a country, as it has happened so many times, this was never a possibility in Costa Rica.

This has provided a solid political stability that has guaranteed, since 1948, that all political disputes have been solved in accordance with constitutional rules.

As I have said before, not having an army is a guarantee to the international community, most in particular to our immediate next-door neighbors, that they will never receive a military aggression from Costa Rica. This is why it is said that Costa Rica has waged peace on the world.

A third remarkable benefit of demilitarization for Costa Rica has been the possibility to reallocate military spending towards more virtuous and humane purposes, such as healthcare, education and environmental conservation. Costa Rica has embraced education as a pillar towards development since the 1880s, as well as healthcare to all inhabitants of the country, be they indigenous or migrant, regardless of their legal status through a world-renowned universal healthcare system.

Regarding environmental conservation, the country is well known internationally as an active promoter of sustainable development, ecological tourism, renewable energies and biodiversity. This is why it is said that Costa Rica, after waging peace on the world has also waged peace on nature.

Yet another benefit is the culture of peace. Having no military forces, there is no military training and therefore not a vast knowledge about how to deal with firearms. According to the Costa Rican Constitution, bearing weapons is not a right but a privilege granted by the State to people that prove sufficient understanding of the risks of keeping weapons at home or carrying them.

#### IV. Challenges of demilitarization.

A few decades ago, civil wars were present in three Central American countries. A peace plan presented by Costa Rica before the international community resulted in strong political commitments from all Central American governments to make all necessary efforts to restore peace. As a result, former Costa Rican President Oscar Arias Sánchez was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1987. Also, as a result, civil wars were eradicated from the region; with relative political stability since then.

Today the challenges faced by the region also have to do with armed violence. Six of the seven most violent countries in the world in 2011 are in the Caribbean basin of Latin America, and three of those are in Central America. These homicide epidemics represent the greatest obstacle to development in the region, without a doubt the most violent region in the world today. Although this has no relation with institutionalized demilitarization, it represents an urgent need to disarm extremely violent populations that show no respect for human life.

On a positive note, Panama has taken the decision a few years back to abolish its military army, which means that Costa Rica shares with its southern neighbor perhaps the safest border in the world, with no military presence on either side of the international border.

Precisely, another challenge of demilitarization today is the urgency to patrol borders and domestic waters against drug trafficking. Central America and Mexico is the natural bridge of heavy narcotics that are trafficked between South America and North America. This has created an illegal market economy of storage, distribution and sale of drugs that has corrupted millions of people in the region pushing them towards violent crime to earn a living and die young.

The drug war in Mexico, in which the military army has been fighting drug lords and cartels over the past 5 years has rendered nearly 50,000 deaths. It is questionable whether military intervention has been successful. Inevitably, the question looms large about what are alternatives to such intervention by the use of force.

#### V. Final considerations.

Moreover, at a global level re-militarization is an increasingly worrisome situation. By 2010, the world has managed to reach an amount of military spending of \$1.6 trillion dollars. Compared to the financial needs to accomplish by 2015 the millennium development goals launched by the United Nations in the year 2000, military spending exceeds such amount by 30 times.

Also, compared to the Climate Change adaptation costs suggested by the Stern Report in 2005, military spending exceeds the amount by 15 times. In other words, the money spent in military armament and weapons is enough to finance adaptation to climate change and all Millennium Development Goals together more than ten times.

The question is which enemy is it that military armies are preparing to fight against. It makes one wonder if they are aware of human-made environmental challenges that already represent a serious threat to civilization as we know it. And yet there is no military army that can fight a battle that knows no borders and that could affect water supplies and fertility of agricultural production to feed all of humanity.

A recent statistic revealed that worldwide we have produced 14 billion rounds of ammunition. That is two bullets per every single person living in the planet. Is this really necessary?

This is a question that has to be dealt with ethically. What is the kind of civilization we expect to build? How much do we wish to embrace peaceful coexistence, the kind that is lived in Japan, a country ranked third in the Global Peace Index?

For countries that do not have an army, like Costa Rica, the abidance of international rule of law represents the ultimate line of defense against any and all foreign aggressions, be it a state aggression such as a foreign military intervention, or a non-state aggression, such as drug trafficking. The recomposition and absolute respect for international treaties and supranational governance enthroned by multilateralism, is not only a guarantee for the preservation of world peace, but, most importantly, the pinnacle of the most civilized peaceful coexistence in today's world.

In 2006, Costa Rica presented the Costa Rica Consensus, which was an idea to readjust the rules of international cooperation according to each country's reduction of military spending. The idea consisted on proposing that the countries that more decidedly reduced their military spending would be the ones to rank higher on the list of countries subject to receiving foreign development aid. Unfortunately, this was not an idea deemed virtuous or of merit by the international community. It is no coincidence that the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council are the biggest sellers of weapons and armament worldwide. They would likely disagree with any international treaty that would promote reduction of military expenditure.

Also in 2006, Costa Rican president Oscar Arias Sánchez led an initiative by a group of Nobel Peace laureates to present what has become known as the Arms Trade Treaty, which was adopted at the United Nations General Assembly as resolution 61/89, "Towards and Arms Trade Treaty: establishing common international standards for the import, export and transfer of conventional arms."

Along with Costa Rica, Japan is among the original co-authors of the resolution. The passing of this resolution counted with support by 153 countries, with 24 abstentions and only one vote against, by the United States of America, who is responsible for \$55 billion dollars a year in international trade of conventional firearms. In October, 2009, president Barack Obama overturned his country's former position, granting support to such an international treaty. As of September, 2011, 58 US Senators oppose the treaty, representing a sufficient number to block any such treaty from being ratified by the United States.

--

As the 21<sup>st</sup> Century moves along into a far more integrated and interconnected global society that at present counts 7 billion inhabitants and is projected to reach 9 billion by 2050, other global challenges will become far more relevant, such as the availability of forests to clean the air that we breathe and the water that we drink, availability of sanitary conditions such as clean water for all the world's population, availability of fertile lands and oceans to grow our food resources such as agricultural crops and fisheries to feed us all, and availability of human security not threatened by climate-related catastrophes.

Putting our guns down would be an ethical step towards building global trust to get our heads and hearts around dealing effectively with far greater issues than military confrontation. This calls on peaceful nations like Japan, like Costa Rica, to lead the way by example.

As Johan Galtung reminds us, "peace is the ability to transform conflict creatively, empathically and harmoniously." This is the aim of the Costa Rican nation and the aspiration of Costa Rica to the world.

Thank you.

Alvaro Cedeno Molinari  
February 08, 2012  
Tokyo, Japan