



PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF COSTA RICA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

Statement by Mr. Bruno Stagno Ugarte
Minister of Foreign Affairs and Worship
of the Republic of Costa Rica in the General Debate
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Mister President,

The 192 Member States gathered here, have not yet taken the qualitative step, already called for by Woodrow Wilson in 1918, for our international order to be based not on “organized rivalries, but an organized common peace.”

We must learn to dilute our national interests. We must foster a shared sense for what is just and necessary. We must understand that the basic premise of collective security is that we must coincide as to the threats we face and the manner in which we must confront them.

We must accept that collective security, in order to be legitimate, must defend international law in the abstract, without preference for some over others. Nevertheless, we continue to have an unequal commitment to international law. Some of us have accepted a multilateralism based on “open agreements, openly arrived at”, whereas others refuse to yield imaginary shares of sovereignty. As long as the latter continue to understand sovereignty as the absence of obligations and responsibilities unto others, they are mortgaging multilateralism.

Here gather consciences and cultures from all latitudes. They do so because they know that the solitude of unilateralism is a dead end. Multilateralism, however, must have subscription fees. Who wants to be treated as a partner has to behave as one. If not, we will never be able to live up to our promise of never again. The never again that we pronounced at the end of the First World War and the Second World War, or that we enunciated following the genocides in Kampuchea and Rwanda, and that still today fails to rally us into solving other situations that are as unacceptable, as intolerable and, on occasion, as unimaginable.

It is unfair to mortgage multilateralism. Particularly, it is unfair to mortgage it when by lack of political will we are affecting one or more partners making a desperate appeal for help. In that regard, we celebrate the fact that the item at the top of the agenda of this General Assembly is climate change... but how long it has taken us! We simply cannot be satisfied with a “better late than never” when already in 1987, exactly 20 years ago, President Maummoon Abdul Gayoom of the Republic of the Maldives alerted us that he did not come to “speak about any international political issues... (but) of the death of a nation.” Of a nation whose 1190 islands will be virtually submerged with the rise in sea level due to climate change. The 911 hotline must respond not only to 9-11, but to all those emergencies covered by the United Nations Charter.

It is time to settle our debt with nature. We simply cannot continue to denaturalize the evidence of climate change. Regardless of how inconvenient the truth may be, and our respective share of responsibility, the truth is here to stay and, year in and year out, it reminds us of it with increasing frequency and intensity.

In Costa Rica, where the most species coexist per square kilometer anywhere in the world, we are committed to going beyond our obligations. We have adopted sustainable actions such as the preservation of 27 percent of our national territory, the generation of energy using renewable energy sources for 98 percent of the generated capacity, the introduction of environmental services payments, and the commitment to advance towards a carbon-neutral economy by the year 2021. However, no matter how sustainable our commitment at the national level, our efforts will be diluted if they are not met by similar commitments in other latitudes. Since climate change does not recognize borders, others with larger debts simply cannot continue living in debit until the eleventh hour.

Although we have registered some advances in international environmental governance both at the global and regional level, we continue to be in normative debt with nature. The Kyoto Protocol is an incomplete instrument, not only because it has not attained universality but also because it does not contain any incentives for the sustainability of the primary forest and its ecosystem services. To make sure that the post-Kyoto scheme does not exclude the primary forests, Costa Rica has been working on incentive mechanisms for avoided deforestation with different intergovernmental groups, including the Coalition for Rainforest Nations and the Forest II.

It is unfair to mortgage multilateralism. It is unrealistic to press others for compliance with the obligations that arise from the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) while disregarding one's own obligations. Both treaties, and all of their articles, are part of an intricate architecture of mutual trust that does not admit any partial constructions. We must avoid both horizontal and vertical proliferation, promote compliance with all of the obligations that arise from these treaties, and condemn every attempt to break the regime of mutual trust.

Multilateralism is not built on tests of strength. In 2006, the world reached a record 1.2 trillion dollars in military spending. According to the Millennium Project, with one tenth of this amount, that is, 121 billion dollars, we would have met the targets for 2006 for all the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in all countries. In 2006, for every dollar spent on average by the OECD Member States, another 7.50 dollars were spent on warfare.

Security does not come from multiplying weapons, history has already proven this too many times. Security comes from remedying injustices, easing shortages, creating opportunities so that we can have collective prosperity on par with collective security. In short, welfare instead of warfare.

In this regard, Costa Rica has been calling for compliance with the Charter, in the sense of promoting "the maintenance of international peace and security with the least diversion for armaments of the world's human and economic resources." Thus reads the dead letter of article 26 of the Charter.¹ It is in that spirit that we have pressed for the adoption of an Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), that is, a legally binding instrument that codifies those existing obligations of States under international law that may apply to the arms trade. It is also in that spirit that we have called for the Costa Rica Consensus, so that international donors reward those developing countries that, while increasing social spending and reducing military spending, are making sustainable and verifiable efforts to meet the most pressing social needs, including the MDGs.

¹ "In practice, the Security Council has not fulfilled the tasks assigned to it by Art.26... Essentially, Art. 26 has remained a dead letter." H-J Schütz, 'Article 26, MN 37', in Bruno Simma (ed), *The Charter of the United Nations*, (2nd edition, 2002).

Multilateralism requires a shared sense of urgency. We need to opportunely face all global threats, all global challenges. We cannot afford to create a world at different speeds: one in which we need two decades to respond to the call made by President Gayoom and others, and another in which in a couple of days we respond with binding 1373 or 1540-like resolutions. Our commitment to combat terrorism must aim at prevailing not only over the terrorists, but also over the root causes from which they draw strength and renewal. In this regard, it is as important to combat the manifestations of terrorism, its financial circuits and physical hideouts as the poverty and despair that provide an easy harvest for the extremists. To succeed we can no longer afford to be latecomers in attending to the challenges of development.

Multilateralism requires a shared sense of justice. For that, we need more States to ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC). As we advance towards the universality of the Statute, and the acceptance of its complementary jurisdiction, we will close the nooks and gaps where the worst criminals known to man currently hide.

Finally, we must have the courage to see ourselves in the mirror, as an Organization and as Member States. We simply cannot allow this Organization to be weakened by the errors of a few. We must learn from our mistakes, we must accept self-criticism. We do a disservice to the credibility and effectiveness of this Organization if every time we experience a difficult or inconvenient situation we simply produce a report for the archives. The scant follow-up given to the Srebrenica Report (Report by the Secretary-General A/54/549) and the Oil-for-Food Program (Report by the Independent Inquiry Committee), are two examples of an apparent continued inability for self-examination and learning.

Mister President,

As Harry Truman said, referring to the summons for the San Francisco Conference, “it was important for us to make a start, no matter how imperfect.” Since 1945, this Organization has expanded and changed, improving with the passing of experiences and reforms, admitting more and more cultures and consciences, putting in practice, with more or less success, the principles and purposes of the Charter. This Organization certainly does not have all the solutions, and does not possess all the resources required, for in the end it is restrained by the lowest common denominator, that is, by ourselves, the Member States.

We have a world of reasons to persevere and prevail over the challenges we face. Neither the chronic pessimism of some, nor the ungrateful egoism of others, will check the slow but determined march forward of those of us who believe in multilateralism and in a better future of shared welfare for all.