

**Speech by the President of the Republic of
Costa Rica
Mister Luis Guillermo Solís Rivera,
as part of the Inauguration Activities of the
Fifth Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on Cluster
Munitions
September 1st, 2014
Melico Salazar Theatre, 6 p.m.**

Ministers of Government,
Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Distinguished officials of the National Authorities,
Distinguished Representatives of the States Parties to the Convention
on Cluster Munitions, Observers, Members of International Bodies and
of Civil Society,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. The Government and people of Costa Rica wish to extend you the warmest welcome to this land, which receives you with great respect and optimism.
2. We are honoured by your presence. Your response to our invitation to partake in the work sessions of the Fifth Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions clearly shows your commitment to building a peaceful world, a world in which we may promote a dignified life for our fellow humans; a life that is respectful of our natural heritage.
3. This Conference is being held in Costa Rica, because this country has been committed, for decades, to disarmament, international law and sustainable development. The constitutional provision that abolishes the army as a permanent institution, as well as the absence of the seven categories of arms that should be reported to the Register of the United Nations are reason enough to compellingly state that Costa Rica does not have, nor ever will have, cluster munitions.
4. Our Country is driven by a strong humanitarian tradition. This vision was already clear 160 years ago, when we abolished the death penalty, and just over half a century ago, when we ratified our confidence in the institutional mechanisms of the international community by means of a constitutional ban on the

Army. Our condition as an unarmed country compels us to actively partake in the development and strengthening of democratic governance worldwide.

5. Which is why our international commitment to disarmament is an intrinsic and distinctive feature of our foreign policy. We are party to every existing instrument against weapons of mass destruction and convention against arms with indiscriminate ranges of action that cause unacceptable harm to civilians.
6. Costa Rica views disarmament as a means to reduce the humanitarian impact of weapons, including cluster munitions, and not simply as a means to control weapons or the constant development of next generation armaments and munitions.
7. Cluster munitions are particularly unacceptable because of their widespread, non-localized range, and because they can lie as duds for decades, unexploded, to suddenly cause mutilations and death. Their indiscriminate effect on people is a threat to our societies as a whole.
8. They destroy families, roadways, schools, hospitals and farmlands. In other words, they exacerbate poverty, restrict economic development and result in greater inequality. This is why States that have deployed these munitions on the territories of other States have the unavoidable moral imperative to cooperate internationally in the clean-up process.
9. It's ironic to witness the astounding level of technological and scientific development achieved by humanity, yet to see that this very same knowledge is being applied to the manufacture of weapons of warfare. Worse so when these weapons have such a shameful impact on civilians.
10. Let us recall the horror of when these munitions were first used, at the dawn of the Second World War, when the Nazi Air Force deployed them over Spain, Guernica in particular. Picasso immortalized the suffering of the people. Regrettably, they were used again throughout the Twentieth Century in other locations like Korea, Indochina, former Yugoslavia, and again during our century, in Lebanon, Syria, Georgia and Sudan and Ukraine, which is definitely reason for concern.

11. Presently, instead of being destroyed, these weapons are still in use, and every year resources are wasted on their manufacture, which is a source of worry for my country. For years now we have expressed our concern for the staggering number of civilian victims who suffer during internal and even international conflicts, not only as a result of collateral damage, but also by being the direct target of warfare.
12. We cannot silently witness this flagrant violation of international humanitarian Law. Let us raise our voices, loud and clear, to firmly condemn the use of cluster munitions wherever they still exist.
13. I also invite you to complement protest with action, so that we may start making progress without further ado.
14. Throughout the years, the international community has developed a robust structure for disarmament within and outside of the United Nations. Costa Rica has contributed to its strengthening, and is a firm believer in multilateral diplomacy and in the need for achieving agreements which, considering the different perspectives of all member States, allow gradual progress on international arms control regimes of all types. I would especially like to acknowledge the efforts made by former President Oscar Arias Sánchez in this regard. During his administration, Costa Rica –with the widest international support– led the approval of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). This decision, but especially the tenacity with which our Nobel Peace Prize winner promoted its adoption, constitute undeniable proof –that I wish to ratify– of Costa Rica’s will to be on the forefront of endeavours for more peaceful and fraternal world.
15. However, we must also acknowledge that the current challenges in this field have not been tended to with the swiftness that this situation would require. National security is still used by some as justification for their reluctance in signing disarmament agreements. You have witnessed the regrettable inaction displayed by some of these bodies, which sadly include the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council.
16. Fortunately, this has not been an obstacle for other States and the civil society to join hands to work towards the common

goal of developing a legally binding international instrument to ban the use, manufacture, transfer and storage of cluster munitions.

17. As a legal document, the Convention fulfils the goal of putting the protection of our civilian populations above concerns of national security or defence. In doing so, it strengthens the paradigm of protecting civilians during armed conflicts. It has proven to be an innovative and essential support for the development and strengthening of the global multilateral disarmament regime of our twenty-first century.
18. Likewise, this Convention is pioneer in acknowledging the rights of victims, complementing the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and acknowledging the unique status of women and children who are victims of cluster munitions.
19. As a result of our joint efforts, just seven years after having started this process in Oslo, and six years after having implemented the Convention in Dublin, over 110 countries have decided to take action to ban the use of these explosive devices. Undoubtedly, the whole world aspires to ban these munitions, and with this meeting in Costa Rica, the Convention has now reached out to all regions of this planet.

Esteemed participants,

20. For Costa Rica, the host of this Fifth Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions, it is a great pleasure to welcome such numerous States, international organizations and representatives from our civil society.
21. Some of these States are participating to a meeting of the Convention for the very first time, mainly as observers. We interpret this gesture as them taking an interest in our work, which is why I wish to extend to them an invitation, so that in the near future they may join us, and become part of this great family, so that they may contribute in making this Convention universal. This is how, in line with the millennium development goals, we will

manage to completely eliminate these weapons and their scourge upon civilian populations and their development.

22. As far as Costa Rica is concerned, we have devoted considerable effort to having other countries in Latin America who are not yet members sign the Convention. We hope for Central America to soon become the first sub-region free of cluster munitions.

23. Our region has had successful experiences on the subject of disarmament. The Treaty of Tlatelolco was one of the major historic landmarks among disarmament efforts. Today, Latin America and the Caribbean are an area free of nuclear weapons.

24. We hope that soon we will also be able to claim that our region is free of cluster munitions.

25. We also wish for this *not to be* just one more meeting of States Parties. We are absolutely convinced of the great need that we all have to truly ban the use and manufacture of cluster munitions. Which is why we have the clear imperative to universalize this convention in order to achieve an absolute ban on these weapons.

26. To this end, we must strengthen the role of the institutions of this convention. We seek to have a secretariat that may promote the effective implementation of our instrument, through a spirit of cooperation and dialogue, which, in a world of sovereign States, is the only tool for real progress.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

27. Of all major human tragedies, war is of particular concern, though all forms of violence have overall effects that destroy the economic and social fabric of nations. It is also heart-wrenching to see the specific effects on people and populations, whose wellbeing should always be above geopolitical calculations.

It is these people, and often the innocents that are trapped between trenches and interests, who suffer most and whose wellbeing and safe-keeping should ultimately be the greatest motivation to achieve agreements to promote disarmament.

It is in this context that I am reminded of the dramatic verses of Costa Rican poet Julieta Dobles, when she said:

*The tears of a single child
awaken within me the tears
of all children in this world.
The tears of the child beaten by the hand
that should save him.
Of the young child orphaned by the war
who seeks refuge in the blood-stained clothes
of his motionless mother,
calling at her, calling at me.*

I believe, along with her, that such cries are the ones that should inspire us in this conference, as there is no greater aim in any international meeting than one which springs from the depths of the human soul to redeem and deliver the same humanity which brings us together.

28. Let's lend our hand so that no more children, whether their names be Mahmud or Fatima, Ivan or Natasha, Marcos or Rosa, Akela, Giang-Long... so than no more children will shed tears as a result of these weapons.
29. My administration will take the compelling message, which I hope results from the deliberations in this conference: The world must say NO to cluster bombs. The world must say NO to violence, war and the unbridled race for more arms. The world must say YES to International Law and YES to development with justice for all.
30. This meeting is our opportunity to send out a strong political message to the International Community. Let us come together under the highest ideals of the Charter of the United Nations in favour of a world without war, a world envisioned by poets and saints throughout history. We can bring this about with the decisive, courageous and committed actions of the Earth's leaders.

Thank you very much,