

**SPEECH BY MR. FRANCISCO SANTOS CALDERON, VICE-PRESIDENT OF
COLOMBIA, DURING THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE CARTAGENA
SUMMIT ON A MINE-FREE WORLD
November 29th, 2009**

Before we start I would like to invite you to hold a minute of silence for the men, women, boys and girls who have died or been injured by antipersonnel mines in the world.

Since 1990 Colombia has had 8,081 victims and 6,285 survivors who suffer from some kind of disability.

On behalf of the Government and the people of Colombia I'd like to welcome you to Cartagena. We are honoured to have you here.

I would like to thank Ambassador Jurg Streuli for his work as President of the Ninth Meeting of the State Parties. His valuable collaboration with the Mine Ban Convention has been a fundamental support in all the organization stages.

We wish the greatest success to Norwegian Ambassador Susan Eckey as President-Designate of the Second Review Conference. We are well prepared thanks to her indisputable leadership.

I would also like to acknowledge the role of the Support Unit of the Convention's Implementation in its execution process.

Finally, I would like to thank the survivors' presence in this Conference, as well as of the international delegates, international organizations and civil society representatives, and journalists from so many different countries.

We have spared no effort to welcome you here today, and to discuss the scope and quality of our work in the Convention's implementation during this week.

This work, which started two years ago with the Eight Meeting of the State Parties in Jordan, when Colombia decided to join, has materialized in this meeting and in the events we have prepared for the State Parties to renew their commitment with the fight against antipersonnel mines.

For Colombia, this Cartagena Summit is an opportunity for the International Community to learn more about our reality's details and for us to learn more about the other State Parties' best practices in the execution of the tasks related to the Convention.

Undoubtedly, Colombia is now an example of the antipersonnel mines issue and the type of efforts required to find a lasting solution.

Signing the Political Statement is a renewal of the commitments acquired with all of the Convention's objectives.

The "Cartagena Plan of Action" will be the starting point for the execution of the pending tasks during the next five years.

This country has faced great and serious terrorist threats. Back in 2002 when we took office, several of our cities were besieged by illegal armed groups. Homicides, abductions, attacks and massacres were an everyday event.

Reality is different now. You have come to a Colombia that is once again safe. And thanks to this, we have recovered our people's trust in ourselves, and the world's trust in Colombia. We have achieved the greatest progress in decreasing all violence indicators, as well as the unemployment and inflation levels, the increase of foreign investment and an improved social inclusion.

Colombia is a country in progress. This is possible thanks to the implementation of a respectful security policy of the State of Rights, without diminishing any of the liberties and increasing the guarantee of human rights.

I speak on behalf of a government where all policies are designed in accordance with human rights.

The main purpose of our democratic security policy is to guarantee the exercise of rights without distinction, and with efficiency and transparency.

Our National Development Plan also aims to guarantee rights, and the Millennium Goals constitute its main purpose.

We have made a lot of progress, but we still face some problems, and we have a

long way to go in order to reach the full reestablishment of peace.

Our country was submerged in this antipersonnel mine tragedy when illegal armed groups started an intensive and indiscriminate use of these weapons to stop the troops' progress and to protect the areas and strategic corridors for weapon and drug trafficking. These illegal armed groups are now using new manufacturing techniques, which have made our already complex problem much worse, as detection and clearing works become more difficult.

We have lived the consequences of this tragedy, and our main reference for our actions is our people's wellbeing. That is why our country maintains its commitment against the use of such artefacts, as well as the design of state policies that support the reestablishment of the rights affected, both to survivors and the affected communities.

After joining the Convention we have rigorously fulfilled our obligations: destroying our arsenal, clearing mined fields, educating on mine risk and generating the necessary conditions to assist the survivors.

We believe that the main principle of the Convention and the actions performed in its context, which focuses on the survivors, is both pertinent and convenient.

In Colombia we have put forward a public policy plan, the main action of which is the guarantee of the reestablishment of each one of the violated rights, in agreement with a differential perspective that sees to the reality of women, boys and girls, natives and people of African descent.

We are also aware of the pending challenges and tasks and we are working hard to overcome the difficulties entailed in a problem of such magnitude. This process will require the continuation of the joint efforts by the government, the international community and civil society.

This week will be full of discussions and reflections regarding the issue of antipersonnel mines in the world. The establishment of a plan of action and political statement that brings us together in order to overcome the mines issue in the world depends on our efforts and resolute participation.

I am here to pass on the voices of thousands of Colombian families who have

suffered because of violence, and on their behalf I want to ask you to join our claim for illegal armed groups to stop planting mines in our country's present or future. No more mines. No more violence against our people.

I would like for this week to become the scenario to renew our commitment, not only with the Convention, but mostly with the survivors. It is a shared commitment with thousands of men, women, boys and girls who, thanks to their pain, tragedy and daily concerns, know that having a mine-free world is much more than just a dream.

The Cartagena Summit has been our wish. It is now the time to act and send out a clear signal to all the people in the world: antipersonnel mines must disappear off the face of Earth.

Thank you very much.