



SPEECH OF VICEPRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF COLOMBIA IN THE SECOND PREPARATORY MEETING FOR CARTAGENA SUMMIT

- Ambassador Susan Eckey, President-Designate of the Second Review Conference
- Ambassador Jurg Streuli, President of the Coordinating Committee of the AP Mine Ban Convention
- His Highness, Prince Mired of Jordan
- Excellencies and friends:

First of all, I would like to greet the Norwegian delegation, led by Honourable Ambassador Susan Eckey, and acknowledge her work as President-Designate of the Second Review Conference of the Mine Ban Convention. From the moment Colombia was appointed as host of the Review Conference, Norway has focused all of its efforts on making sure this event gives continuity to the process which began over 10 years ago, and which has been developed with the sole purpose of definitely eradicating anti-personnel mines around the world.

Likewise, I would like to emphasize the work done by the Implementation Support Unit, led by Mister Kerry Brinkert. The Unit has played a significant role in the preparation of the Cartagena Summit and has provided unconditional support to the Colombian organization team. Furthermore, I would like to emphasize and acknowledge the work executed by several countries, international organizations and the civil society to ensure the Conference's success in Cartagena.

As you know, the "Cartagena Summit on a mine-free world" is the best scenario for all the State Parties to publicly ratify our commitment and remain determined in our decision to put an end to this burden. These weapons represent a threat for men, women, boys and girls whose human rights have been infringed and whose living conditions have been significantly affected. Because of these artefacts, entire communities face barriers that prevent them from achieving social and economic development.

I know that each and every one of the States here present, including those that have yet to sign the Convention, are doing their best to put a definitive end to all the suffering generated by such artefacts. Year after year, the decrease in number of victims and the higher number of fields cleared confirm the depth of this commitment. Therefore, the Review Conference is a space for us to share our achievements, difficulties and challenges during these first ten years of Mine Action. The lessons we have learnt and the road we have covered will be our starting point to face the challenges during the upcoming years.

The Cartagena Summit on a Mine - Free World



We are well aware of the States' commitment to this fight and therefore we hope to have your participation, at the highest possible level, in the Cartagena Summit. This is not just the wish of Colombia as the host country, our President-Designate and the Conference's organizers, but basically that of thousands of victims around the world, including boys and girls whose present and future depend on the decisions and commitments we adopt at the higher level in this Cartagena Summit.

The affected victims and communities would not understand, and even less accept it if the international community, Governments, international organizations and civil society failed to make an effort of being represented in Cartagena at the highest level, nor would they understand if we made the historical mistake of reducing the Conference to a meeting between technical experts instead of leaders who have the ethical and moral responsibility of making political and institutional decisions in favour of the victims, with the absolute purpose of ending this horrible and inhumane anti-personnel mines practice.

This is the only way to make sure the commitments acquired at the Convention stay valid throughout the years to come and that the decisions made in Cartagena translate into concrete actions that benefit the victims and the affected populations.

For Colombia, the Cartagena Summit is a unique opportunity. It will represent a great scenario to advance towards adopting concrete measures that focus on actions in favour of the victims, in the universalization of the Convention, in the removal of mines and their destruction; tasks that require a strengthening of international cooperation as well as its assistance for a full implementation.

Likewise, Cartagena will represent a chance for the international community to understand the dimension of the mines issue we face, as well as the complex violent conditions that affect us.

While the Colombian Government has fulfilled the obligations acquired in regards to humanitarian demining, illegal armed groups have developed new ways of producing such artefacts and continue to use them in a systematic and indiscriminate manner. The composition of these mines, together with the planting pattern that follows no doctrine, looks to make them even more lethal and to difficult their detection and removal; even more so when such practice by the illegal armed groups is closely linked to the organized criminal practice of drug trafficking.

In the centre of this complex reality are the victims; the thousands of men, women, boys and girls that continue to be affected by these weapons and the communities whose rights to freedom of movement, development and enjoyment of the minimal welfare conditions have been limited.

Only by knowing this reality will it be possible to understand our challenges in the fight against this burden.

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During your visit to Cartagena, you will have the opportunity to visit the township of Bajo Grande in the Bolivar Department. This township was witness to the violent actions by illegal armed groups that controlled this part of the national territory for almost 10 years, forcing its inhabitants to move to nearby municipalities and even to large cities.

Fortunately, and thanks to the tireless work executed by Law Enforcement, this region was intervened with Humanitarian Development operations, and was completely cleared by 2008. However, the work does not end there. The Colombian Government is currently working on assisting the affected communities on the recovery of productive lands, the return of its inhabitants and the reconstruction of the public utilities' network, among other things. The Humanitarian Demining experience in Bajo Grande, although an achievement in itself, illustrates the Governments' enormous challenge to bring integral development opportunities to the recovered zones.

Colombia needs the unanimous support of the international community. This support should translate, on the one hand, into the condemnation of actions by illegal armed groups that operate in the national territory and of the organized criminal practice of drug trafficking and, on the other hand, it should translate into the decided collaboration to achieve the integral recovery of the victims and the affected communities.

It is clear that challenges and needs such as the ones I have just presented are not exclusive to our country. We know that other Affected Countries face complex situations as well, possibly even more critical than ours. Likewise, we acknowledge the support of the Donor Countries who, in a gesture of solidarity, have taken on a clear responsibility in the fight against anti-personnel mines. Therefore, I reiterate the invitation to all States – Affected and Donor., - Party and Observing-, and the entire international community to attend the Cartagena Summit at the highest level and reiterate their commitment to the principles established at the Convention.

Colombia and Cartagena are prepared to welcome the States' delegations, the International Organizations, the civil society, the media and other participants that will attend the Second Review Conference of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction.

From this very moment, we want to welcome each and every one of the delegates that will visit us in Cartagena. In Colombia you will find some significant progress in the fight against anti-personnel mines, but you will also find a Country of hospitable people, as well as a sample of our history and cultural traditions.

We are counting on your presence at the Review Conference in Cartagena, in the same way the world is counting on the commitment by all the States, international organizations and civil society here present to ratify our commitment with the victims through a solid and

The Cartagena Summit on a Mine - Free World



decisive Action Plan and a convincing Political Statement to reaffirm that a mine-free world is a shared commitment.

Thank you very much.

Francisco Santos Calderón
Vicepresident
Colombia