



Message from President of Costa Rica Oscar Arias Sanchez to the International Conference: Peace Constitutions for Global Disarmament

Read by Karen Olsen
Puntarenas, Costa Rica
2009-07-16

President Arias, who could not join us today, asked me to read this message on his behalf:

My dear friends:

I am deeply sorry that I cannot be with you in person to participate in this valuable conference; and to see with my own eyes the Peace Boat, an extraordinary vessel that rises above its own history. Ships, after all, have long been symbol of war. From the mighty fleets that crossed the wine-dark sea of Homer's epics, to the battles of the Spanish Armada, to the massive warships of the 20th Century—all too often, ships have been instruments of violence. All too often, they have crossed the distances between nations only to deliver a cargo of bitterness and destruction. That is why I am so honored that on this day, in this place, Costa Rica has the opportunity to welcome, not a ship of war, but a ship of peace, and to host discussions about the promises of peace we have made in the past.

Costa Rica and Japan made our promises when we declared peace on the world, and abolished our armies. However, that promise was only a first step. Choosing peace as a way of life is like raising a white flag upon your mast, at the start of a long and challenging journey. Your work is only the beginning. Waves of discord are bound to break across your bow. Dark cloud of violence may tempt you to change your course. And even on a clear day, the work of sustaining a lasting peace is endless: teaching our children, caring for the sick, lifting families out of poverty. I am proud that today, you will discuss the achievements and challenges of Costa Rica and Japan on this journey, and draw conclusions that can help all those who travel with us.

I understand that you are also gathered here today because of the international community's promises of peace, and failure to fulfill them. I refer, of course, to Article 26 of the United Nations' Charter, and its unfulfilled promise of arms control. In many ways, the UN ship of peace has not even touched the water. It remains a blueprint, confined to paper. I am very pleased that you will be examining this dream deferred, and considering two measures that Costa Rica has presented to address this situation. One is the Costa Rica Consensus, an initiative to create financial mechanisms to reward developing countries that spend more on environmental protections, education, health care and housing for its peoples, and less on weapons and soldiers. The other measure is the Arms Trade Treaty that we presented to the United Nations in 2006. This treaty seeks to prohibit the sale of arms to States, groups or individuals, when there is sufficient reason to believe that they will be used to violate human rights or International Law. Both these initiatives need all the support they can get, especially from leaders like you, if we are to make them a reality.

It was the great poet Henry Wadsworth who coined the term "ships that pass in the night." He wrote that "on the ocean of life, we pass and speak one another, only a look And voice, then darkness again and silence." My friends: as the President of my country, and as a Nobel Laureate, I have learned time and time again that we who seek the shores of non-violence and harmony, must not take the journey alone. We may all have our own ships to steer, but we must find ways to come together and support each other, to learn from each other's achievements and offer support for each other's challenges. We must find a way to build community, even in the darkness and silence of the lonely seas that Longfellow described.

So I thank the Peace Boat, and the International Association of Lawyers Against Nuclear Arms, for bringing people together. I thank all of you for adding your voice to the conversation about peace and progress in our world. Most of all, on behalf of the people of Costa Rica, I thank you for being our fellow travelers on this journey – one that we hope all of humanity will one day make with us.