

Security Council Open Debate on Post-Conflict Peacebuilding: Institution Building
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Statement by H.E. Mr. Eduardo Ulibarri, Permanent Representative of Costa Rica to the United Nations

I would like to begin by thanking the delegation of Bosnia and Herzegovina for its initiative in convening this open debate. I would also like to thank Deputy Prime Minister José Luis Guterres of Timor-Leste, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Ambassador Peter Wittig for their opening briefings.

Costa Rica has decided to participate in this important debate because we believe that we can contribute some pertinent ideas and experiences on institution-building as a way to consolidate peace and improve the well-being of people in the aftermath of conflict. To recall the historical background, in 1948 our country went through a brief civil war brought on by elections disputes. What made this case different from so many others was that the victorious Government junta soon handed over power to the legitimately elected authorities, abolished the army and convened an assembly that issued the Constitution that still governs us today. Those institutional decisions, along with longstanding political, economic and social values and dynamics, explain our continued stability and internal peace in a region that has so often been affected by conflict.

During the 1980s, when wars were bloodying Central America, our country played a key role in setting a course towards peace. On 7 August 1987, the Presidents of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua signed the accord known as Esquipulas II, in which they committed themselves to initiating national dialogue processes aimed at ending internal hostilities, holding free and fair elections and forging a peaceful and democratic future.

The success of this process was primarily the result of the willingness of local actors, who were exhausted by violence and aware that the imminent end to the Cold War would cease to fuel hostilities. However, the active participation of the international community and the existence of regional leadership to guide those efforts also played an essential role. That leadership was embodied by Presidents Vinicio Cerezo Arévalo of Guatemala and Óscar Arias Sánchez of Costa Rica, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts. For their part, the Organization of American States and the United Nations were able to coordinate efforts to promote national and regional willingness to support the process and ensure the implementation of agreements.

Various lessons can be learned from this situation, as reflected in the elements to which I have just referred. What was key to consolidating peace, however, was understanding that a cessation of hostilities would be to little avail if the regional agreement and the national accords that ensued in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala did not address the root causes of the conflicts. That understanding was also the reason for the decision to set up local political, institutional and socio-economic follow-up mechanisms, along with valuable international support.

Central America's evolution since that time also led us to understand that if challenges are not addressed in time they can weaken peace processes, place democracy at risk and even damage relations between neighbouring nations. Our region buried its internal wars, promoted democratic processes and opened up uncertain paths towards improving people's well-being. However, this did not necessarily bring with it a vigorously inclusive development process, an end to violence — now criminal in nature — or the widespread consolidation of democratic institutions and practices. Today some Central American countries are among the world's most violent. Moreover, one country recently violated the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity. To varying degrees, all of this endangers peace and coexistence at both the local and regional levels.

But from those missteps come important lessons about post-conflict institution-building, to which I should now like to turn.

First, we should design policies that, in addition to promoting post-conflict stability and economic development, also contribute to the widest possible enjoyment of their benefits. Social inclusion is key to peace.

Secondly, in countries with a large percentage of young people such as ours, it is crucial to increase opportunities for youth in the areas of education, recreation and employment. Without that, both the temptations posed by gangs and organized crime and the continuing cycle of poverty may prove to be

unavoidable.

Thirdly, the establishment of institutions, including political parties, must be accompanied by good political practices. Without observing such practices, institutions can become victims of corruption and manipulation, or become simply window dressing for authoritarianism, arbitrary rule and adventurism.

Fourthly, the effectiveness and independence of judicial authorities is another key factor to lasting peace, given that the judiciary is the ultimate resort for the peaceful resolution of conflicts and the most obvious barrier to impunity and crime.

Fifthly, we must keep in mind that it is more difficult to entrench a genuine culture of democracy and peace than to establish institutions. Peace and democracy education is therefore essential.

Finally, fostering an independent and vigorous civil society, a free and honest press and a culture of accountability also substantially increases prospects for peacebuilding.

To sum up, we believe that actions should lead to comprehensive approaches to conflicts, both in order to resolve them and to consolidate the progress made. The role of the United Nations, and of the Security Council in particular, is key to that end; as is the guidance provided by the Peacebuilding Commission. An essential part of the mission of the United Nations must be working as part of the ongoing processes of conflict prevention, peacekeeping and peacebuilding, including the promotion of development, institutions and a culture of peace and democracy.

That necessarily implies a joint effort by all organs and agencies of the United Nations at every stage of those processes, as well as the determination not to act only when weapons are fired but when threats appear. That is something that must of course start with a serious political commitment.