



**STATEMENT BY THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF
COLOMBIA, AMBASSADOR GUILLERMO FERNÁNDEZ DE
SOTO, DURING THE ELEVENTH SESSION OF THE
CONFERENCE OF STATES PARTIES
TO THE OPCW**

The Hague, December 5th of 2006

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Mr. President of the Conference,
Mr. Director General,
Excellencies,
Delegates,

I would like to start this statement by mentioning two illustrious representatives of Ibero-America, who reflect -like the "Buried Mirror" of Carlos Fuentes- our intellectual and cultural wealth as well as their special human condition.

On the one hand, I want to praise the work carried out during the last year by the Ambassador of Peru, José Antonio Arróspide, as President of the X Conference. His friends will miss him, now that his mission is coming to an end.

Also, I feel very honored by the presidency to be exerted by the Ambassador of Spain, Alfonso Dastis, during this XI Session. I am certain it will be as virtuous as was his leadership in the Executive Council and I reiterate all our collaboration to him in the tasks he has taken on, which will of a certainty take us one step further in our work.

Mr. President,

When I started writing these words, on a cold afternoon in The Hague, innumerable images of the power of devastation of chemical weapons were re-created in my mind. I remembered that the First World War caused over 90,000 fatal victims of these arms, a million wounded and thousands of tons of chemical substances that still remain latent on the face of the earth.

I also thought about the innocent children, women and elderly, who have been victims as consequence of toxic agents; about the bleak towns without illusions and future; and about the arrogance of the human being who has devastated itself and also its environment, in wars and more wars as if it were an endless race.

This dismal panorama neither allowed nor stimulated me to write down one more word. I put my pen and paper aside, let the hours pass and kept a reflective silence, waiting for the light of the following day.

Mr. President,

At the light of that new day, while reading opinion columns that announced a "new international order", "the new era of globalization" and "a new homo globatus", I decided to take up these words again. I believe that, from a historical point of view, humanity has the power to learn from the mistakes of the past and, also, has the capacity to identify the present challenges in order to construct a better world.

Under this perspective, which recognizes that the history of the future is contained in the past, I would like to bring up some points, which several recognized contemporary intellectuals have considered to be the "three great wars of humanity against terror": the first one is against the worldwide networks of terrorists; the second against the great natural and non-natural aggressions that affect the civil infrastructure, from earthquakes and the consequences of the global heating to genocide and ethnic cleaning; and the third against weapons of mass destruction.

And it is precisely in this last challenge in which the OPCW is making a difference and is laying out the foundations for the construction of a new history of peace, non-proliferation and disarmament, an effort on our part which the next generations, in the nearby future, will certainly recognize.

And this legacy that is being woven has been made possible by the commitment of our nations, both in participating in the decision making on the progressive elimination of the chemical arsenals, and in implementing the Convention at a national level. In other words, multilateralism is demonstrating its virtues.

For Colombia, this is one of the governing principles of its foreign policy. Multilateralism must be preserved and strengthened at all times. This is a necessity, and at the same time an opportunity, to construct the future of a civilization that shares its values intrinsically. The Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, affirmed with lucidity: "to choose or to reject multilateralism is not a question of political convenience for a State, be it big or small. It has consequences that go beyond the purely immediate."

Mr. President,

Colombia wishes to reiterate in this session its highest political commitment to complying with the Convention, in a comprehensive way and in the established terms. Our interest is in promoting its effective implementation in our country, as well as in Latin America and the Caribbean.

In this session, my delegation supports the declaration that the Ambassador of Cuba, Oscar de los Reyes Ramos, has stated on behalf of the Movement of the Non-Aligned Countries and China.

I would particularly like to draw attention to some subjects that reflect the interest of my country in contributing effectively to the OPCW.

a. Destruction of chemical weapons

Chemical weapons constitute a threat for the international security and peace. Therefore, advances in their destruction must continue to be made –as the governing principle -, in agreement with the terms established in the Convention.

Colombia thanks the delegations which in the course of this year have informed the OPCW of their interest in requesting an extension of the deadlines for the destruction of chemical weapons, in the certainty that they will do everything in their power to strictly fulfill the established dates, that is to say no later than the year 2012.

Nevertheless, the slow progress registered in this matter is a reason for preoccupation. I would like to bring to mind that this Treaty must be implemented in an integral, effective and nondiscriminatory way. I think that the destruction of chemical weapons needs to continue being one of the maximum priorities of the Organization.

In this context, my delegation considers it a positive initiative that members of the Executive Council of the OPCW should periodically visit the great possessors of chemical weapons, who have asked for a prorogation of their terms of destruction, as United Kingdom has proposed. This additional mechanism will offer greater transparency on the advances obtained.

b. Plan of Universality

The delegation of Colombia wishes to express its satisfaction about the positive results obtained in the implementation of the Plan of Universality of the Convention, which has led to an increase in the number of States Parties to 181. This result ratifies the fact that we are constructing and participating in a successful history.

I would especially like to congratulate the Director General, Rogelio Pfirter, and his team of the Technical Secretariat for having reached the established goal for the year 2006. I trust that the small minority of States, altogether 14, which does not form part of the Convention, will express its unequivocal political commitment to disarmament and proliferation, ratifying and adhering to this Treaty as soon as possible.

c. Implementation of Article VII

Within the framework of Article VII, I would like to emphasize the important advances obtained by the States Parties in the implementation of the Convention at a national level, in particular in the establishment of national authorities and the drafting of legislation. These results have been the fruit of the valuable support of the Technical Secretariat, the efforts of the States Parties, and the firm belief in the validity of an approach of cooperation and assistance.

Colombia reiterates that there should not be any excuses that prevent the advance in the fulfillment of the tasks contemplated in this Article. It is necessary, therefore, that States Parties redouble their efforts in order to take advantage of the dynamism obtained and to present greater results in the Twelfth Conference. At the same time, we face the challenge of efficiently taking advantage of the resources of cooperation and technical assistance offered by the Secretariat.

The commitment of Colombia is invariable and has allowed us to obtain, among others, the following internal results: the establishment of a National Authority in 2002; a legislation that covers the main areas of the Convention; exertion of a greater control on the import of certain chemical substances; providing the initial declarations that the Convention demands, as well as the subsequent declarations, within the established terms; and providing the annual declarations of the national plans of protection against chemical weapons.

That is to say, Colombia has fulfilled its task within the time limits agreed upon and is interested in contributing to the promotion of the implementation of the Convention in the region. In this sense, we led the organization of the second work-session with the Andean countries on national legislation against chemical arms, held in the General Secretariat of the Andean Community, this past month of April, in Lima. Also, we organized together with the Technical Secretariat of the OPCW the "Second regional meeting of representatives of the chemical industry of Latin America and the Caribbean", in June, in the city of Santa Marta, Colombia.

d. International cooperation

I would like to point out the importance of the international exchange of scientific and technical information and of chemical substances and equipment destined to the production, elaboration or use of chemical substances for non-prohibited aims.

In that sense, Colombia has a great interest in strengthening the programs of cooperation of the Technical Secretariat and in realizing the complete and effective application of Article XI of the Convention. Also, it considers that the cooperation programs must have more financial and human resources in order to allow a greater number of activities with a high impact around the strategic axes of the Convention.

e. Assistance and Protection

The assistance and protection area is one of the branches of the Organization that are of high-priority for my country. During these last years, Colombia has been working in a close and fruitful cooperation with the Technical Secretariat on the development of national capacities of protection against chemical weapons.

The assistance received, as well as the donation of important protective equipment given by the Government of Sweden and the OPCW, has had extraordinary results. At present we have a national system of prevention and attention of emergencies, with the active participation of the civilian and military sector, which is prepared for taking care of incidents with weapons or industrial toxic chemical substances. Also, it has allowed the country to develop capacities that have been recently offered to the Organization by virtue of Article X.

We consider that the moment has arrived to share the experiences and strengths we acquired with Latin America and the Caribbean. This initiative has been materialized, in one first instance, through the accomplishment of a regional workshop on assistance and protection, which will be held in Bogotá between 11 and 13 of December of the current year, with the valuable financial contribution of the Czech Republic.

In this context, my Government wishes to explicitly recognize the determined interest and cooperation of the Technical Secretariat. We hope to continue advancing in this direction.

f. Fight against terrorism

In the fight against chemical terrorism, our nations should no spare any efforts. I think that the OPCW, in the light of Resolution 1540 of the United Nations Security Council and the Global Strategy of the UN against terrorism, has the obligation to play a leading role to face the new global threats.

The development of national programs of protection, the implementation at national level of the Convention and the Plan of Universality are decisive steps in this direction that allow us, without doubt, to progressively close the breaches that have been created by globalization and are being used by criminal organizations. Therefore, we need to reduce the level of vulnerability for the use of arms of mass destruction by terrorist groups, and to have a greater control over the production, distribution and use of chemical substances at global level.

Mr. President,

I would like to conclude this intervention remembering the words of the writer Victor Hugo, who taught us with great lucidity that "the future has many names. For the weak, it is the unattainable. For the afraid, it is the unknown. For the brave, it is an opportunity."

I invite you to live a new opportunity: a future that spreads our aspirations of peace and security in the world.

Thank you very much.