

Remarks by the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for
Latin America and the Caribbean at the opening of the regional seminar
“United Nations Peacebuilding Commission”
14 September 2009

Mr. Mariano Fernández, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Chile;

Mr. Heraldo Muñoz, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Chile
to the United Nations and Chairman of the Peacebuilding Commission;

Ms. Judy Cheng–Hopkins, Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding
Support;

Mr. Edmond Mulet, Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping;

Ambassador Juan Eduardo Eguiguren, Director for Multilateral Affairs,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Chile;

Panellists and special guests;

Members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited in Chile;

Representatives of academic, military and security institutions;

Colleagues from the United Nations System in Chile,

Ladies and gentlemen;

Friends.

First allow me to welcome you to ECLAC, headquarters of the
United Nations in the region and an institution whose history is closely
intertwined with that of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Although the region is now at peace, its recent history has been
plagued by coups d'état, armed uprisings, civil wars and border disputes.
For decades we experienced the cruelty of armed conflict, but we also
managed to traverse the difficult road towards peace.

The action of the United Nations has, from the outset, been
stamped with the desire to restore and preserve peace as a fundamental
good for all humanity. Indeed, for many years, when people thought of
the United Nations, the first images to spring to mind would be of
uniformed soldiers in blue helmets in conflict zones, such as those

deployed with the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan in 1949.

The way in which the United Nations has approached the fulfilment of its mission has evolved over the past 60 years. Different mechanisms and procedures have been pursued, from the deployment of traditional peacekeeping forces to the development of new concepts and protocols, such as early warning, conflict prevention and conflict resolution, post-conflict rehabilitation and the whole notion of peacebuilding.

It is precisely on the basis of its several decades of peacemaking and peacekeeping experience that the United Nations has assumed a commitment beyond contributing to the establishment of ceasefires, the signing of peace accords and the maintenance of order, and begun to direct its efforts towards tackling the deep roots of conflicts with a view to preventing them from flaring up again in the future. The Peacebuilding Commission was therefore set up in 2005 as an intergovernmental advisory body whose objective is to support the formulation of comprehensive strategies that can lay the foundations for sustainable development in the wake of armed conflicts.

This Commission is the outcome not only of decades of experience, but also of the ideas put forward in various documents issued by the Office of the Secretary-General. These include the report of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change entitled “*A more secure world: our shared responsibility*”, which describes the various threats to international peace and security that need to be taken into account when trying to build a lasting peace, including the scourges of poverty, infectious diseases and environmental degradation, as well as terrorism and international organized crime. The report of the Commission on Human Security, entitled “*Human security now*”, similarly proposes strategies to protect people from various threats to their human rights. The report of the Secretary-General, “*In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all*”, calls for all to work for freedom so that people everywhere can live with dignity and free from misery and fear, and outlines a series of proposals for Governments that was presented to the General Assembly in 2005.

Dear friends,

The words of the Minister of Foreign Relations of Chile and the statements made by authorities at the opening of this seminar will provide the framework for the analysis of the mandate and activities of the Peacebuilding Commission and will thus guide your work today.

I do not, therefore, wish to refer in detail to the activities and experiences of the Commission. I shall instead comment only on the way in which the work of the Peacebuilding Commission is viewed from the perspective of our region, and in ECLAC in particular, and mention the closer form of cooperation we envisage for the future.

First, I would like to remind you that, since the 1980s, ECLAC staff have participated decisively in various political, electoral and peacekeeping missions, contributing their skills and experience in places such as Angola, Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Kosovo, Mozambique, Namibia, Nicaragua, South Africa and Timor-Leste.

As I said at the outset, Latin America and the Caribbean has also been the object of attention of the United Nations. Several peace missions have been deployed in the region over the past few decades, including: the United Nations Observer Group in Central America (ONUCA) to verify on-site compliance with the Esquipulas II Agreement by the Governments of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua; the Mission of the Representative of the Secretary-General in the Dominican Republic (DOMREP); the United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL); the United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA); and the various missions in Haiti.

The largely positive and encouraging outcome of these missions has been tinged in some cases by frustration that, although we often helped end the conflict, on many occasions we did not manage to tackle the structural factors that gave rise to it in the first place. I refer to poverty, unequal income distribution, landownership issues, the exclusion of large segments of the population, the weak rule of law and the poor administration of justice, among many other causes.

Peace is not only the absence of conflict, it is the first building block of development. And this is an area in which there is plenty of room for collaboration among ECLAC, the Peacebuilding Commission and its Peacebuilding Support Office.

I would also like to remind you that ECLAC has begun to examine one issue that affects and concerns us all: the level of youth violence in the region. A proposal has been put forward to draw lessons from post-conflict experiences in Latin America and the Caribbean in light of the situation of youth violence in Central America. We believe that this is one area in which another line of cooperation could be pursued by building on the agreement signed by ECLAC with the Government of El Salvador which has recently taken office.

As I noted earlier, ECLAC is committed to participating in the United Nations' efforts to promote and provide technical assistance for the establishment of the rule of law, in light of its links with development. We are therefore closely following the activities of entities such as the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala and its pioneering role in the region in the pursuit of justice with support from the international community for civil and political rights abuses. We believe that this exercise could be translated to the realm of economic, social and cultural rights. The violation of these rights has also been a major cause of many of the conflicts that our region has been through.

I would also like to talk about the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) and the prospects for further international collaboration in peacebuilding operations in that country. The characteristics of such collaboration will obviously be subject to the approval of the Government of Haiti.

Since the establishment of MINUSTAH in 2004, which specifically includes a development component, we have all felt that we have been given a fresh opportunity to support Haiti in the construction of democracy, the restoration of the rule of law and the gradual and increasingly sure transition from humanitarian aid to development aid.

ECLAC has responded to the challenge by placing itself at the service of Mr. Juan Gabriel Valdés, the first Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti, and our actions in this regard received the full backing of a resolution passed to that effect at an ECLAC session.

That resolution requested the Executive Secretary of ECLAC to coordinate possible modes of cooperation with the Government of Haiti and MINUSTAH and to support countries in the region that wished, with ECLAC participation, to optimize their actions within the framework of the MINUSTAH mandate.

ECLAC, through its subregional headquarters in Mexico, whose geographical area encompasses Haiti, has been providing several forms of assistance, including inputs for a long-term development plan, poverty-reduction strategies, gender policies and measures to further a national sustainable development strategy.

We believe, however, that as the Regional Commission of the United Nations, we should, in consultation with our member States and our counterparts within the Organization, go further and explore more comprehensive collaboration within a scheme to build lasting peace in Haiti, especially considering the efforts already being made by Governments in the region, such as the mechanism for cooperation among the Ministers of Defence and Foreign Relations of the countries that maintain a presence in Haiti.

We are very pleased to see the support provided by the Peacebuilding Fund, through its emergency window, to strengthen security at the civilian prison in Port-au-Prince, and think that ECLAC could help propose other projects for consideration by the Fund that could obtain subsequent support from financing agencies or donor countries in keeping with its terms of reference.

I would like to close by referring to two other areas in which ECLAC has worked or is working closely with other United Nations peace-related initiatives.

One of these is the application of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security. The Division for Gender Affairs of ECLAC provided support for a regional seminar on the drafting of national strategies for the resolution's implementation. This issue is a focus of attention at ECLAC, and we will continue to work to raise and spread awareness of the role of women in peace and security for development.

Accordingly, and in the framework of our participation in the Organization's initiatives against prohibited conducts, such as discrimination, harassment, including sexual harassment, abuse of authority, and sexual abuse and exploitation in all forms, ECLAC is looking into organizing a series of training activities in the region together with the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs and the Task Force on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Humanitarian Crises.

We believe that the possibility of a lasting peace depends also on how the Organization ensures that its own peacemaking, -keeping and -building efforts adhere to the ethical standards and fundamental values of human rights, and in this regard we would like to furbish the various agents in the region participating in such initiatives with the tools they need to act as multipliers of good practices wherever they operate.

Minister,

Before I close, I would like to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of the Ministry of Foreign Relations of Chile and its permanent mission to the United Nations at Headquarters and express our appreciation for its support in the organization of this seminar, which brings together panellists, presenters and moderators of some note. It is for us a pleasure and a source of pride to host this event in the headquarters of the United Nations in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Dear friends,

Ralph Bunche, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1950 for his mediation between Israel and the Arab States to achieve an armistice in Palestine, said that the task of peace required a special optimism if it was not to fail along the way, an almost naïve optimism that consisted of never presuming that some things may be impossible.

I think we need, in full awareness of our limitations and the realities of our situation, to move ahead with the optimism that Bunche urged us to cherish, confident in the justice of our cause and driven by our obligation to restore hope to the many who have been denied their rights and their dignity.

Thank you very much and welcome.