

ARIAS: 'If we had a different value system, for sure peace should be in the curriculum, but what is fashionable is war. It's much easier to make war than to make peace'

Continued from page 1

The American paradoxes

The Nobel Laureat began by expressing his agreement on the possibility of compassion existing in government, even though these two words, compassion and government, seem to be mutually exclusive. He also stressed the need for change in this society's value system.

"I do believe that we can't survive at the beginning of the 21st century with the ethics of the 20th century. We need to change the value system," Arias said.

And this change in the system requires a commitment that starts with each person. It does not lie just in the government, although it does have a great responsibility.

In the case of President George W. Bush, Arias emphasized that he used the word "compassion" a lot during his presidential campaign.

"However, the language of compassion has disappeared from his discourse since he took office."

Referring to four values of American society — respon-

sibility, freedom, democracy, and prosperity — which Arias he agrees with entirely, Arias explained to the audience in a critical way how these values, longed for by the entire world and proclaimed by the American government as its pillars, are not being put into practice by the government of this country.

Speaking about responsibility, Arias used the example of a kid who breaks a window unintentionally while playing baseball, in order to illustrate the North American case. The child is made to take responsibility for his actions and to do many tasks to compensate for the damage. In the case of North American — Arias asked of the audience — how we make the United States take responsibility for all the broken windows around the world?

The land of freedom proclaims this value on its territory. However, many examples given by Arias about the U.S.'s interventions in countries like Puerto Rico, or the interrogations that a person in Costa Rica had to go through when she expressed her intentions of visiting Cuba,

illustrated to the attendance how practicing freedom is not an easy task when the American government decides to enforce their pillars according to their own interest.

Apparently America is the paradigm of democracy.

"The rule seems to change when U.S. goes outside."

Telling the audience about the American government's support for the military governments in Chile and Argentina in the past, Arias made clear the paradox of talking about democracy while in reality actions show American support for non-democratic regimes.

"Certainly when you sent arms to Pinochet in the past or to the Argentinean military, you knew they were going to be used, sooner or later, to kill their people."

Finally, Arias pointed out the fourth value: prosperity.

"Prosperity is not only the American dream, it is also the American reality," which in his words means that this country is wealthy enough to make investments, but also to spend money on weapons and support militaries.

"I mean if you're crazy enough [referring to the government] to be willing to spend 48 extra million dollars in defense for next year, it's up to you because you can afford to do that. And I'm wondering how you can [asking the audience] support your president when he asks the U.S. government for an extra \$48 million, of which twenty-five percent goes to fight terrorism, the rest is just to keep the arms market and arms manufacturing?" Arias asked.

Once the former president illustrated the pillars of American values, he emphasized one more time the need for a different value system. Arias recognized the compassion expressed by Americans because the terrorist attacks of September 11 as a major sample of what Americans can do about values and urged the audience to continue in that way.

"What a wonderful world this will be if we all responded to those events with the same urgency and dedication which the people of the United States responded to the tragedy of the September 11," said Arias.

How to help

At the end of the conference, the peace leader answered some questions from the audience. One of the questions was about the ways Americans can contribute to improve the situation in Latin America. To open markets, investment abroad, and pursue countries to not to buy arms, were the three things pointed out by Arias as the fundamental areas in which the American government has a lot to do.

"It is in your own interest [the American government's] to expand NAFTA to the rest of the Latin American countries... I will do all I can because this is the best opportunity for us to make our economies grow. I mean no American companies want to invest in Central America if we don't have access to the U.S. market."

Finally, the Noble Peace Laureat asked for more solidarity, integrity, justice, love, generosity, and equality, "because Cuba or Korea are not a threat, now the real threats are hunger, disease, terrorism, and drugs."