

ECLAC Statement – Tuesday, 30 June 2014

Fifth Session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (30 June and 1 July 2014, Maastricht, the Netherlands)

Welcome remarks

- Thank you Mr. Chair. On behalf of the Executive Secretary of UNECLAC, Mrs. Alicia Bárcena, I would like to especially thank the Government of the Netherlands and the Aarhus Convention Secretariat for inviting ECLAC to participate at the Fifth Session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention in this marvelous city of Maastricht.
- We greatly value the opportunity to learn from this very unique environmental treaty that explicitly links environmental protection, human rights and access rights and share our regional process with you.
- As the delegate of Chile has explained, our region has chosen to initiate its own path to strengthen the access rights relating to the environment. But have also agreed to benefit from other experiences, such as the Aarhus Convention, widely recognized as the most far-reaching elaboration of Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration.
- I take this opportunity to thank Mr. Jit Peters, Chair of the Aarhus Convention, who attended the Third Meeting of the Signatory Parties of the Latin America and the Caribbean Declaration and shared with our region the most relevant lessons, learned from the negotiation and implementation of the Aarhus Convention. I would also like to express my gratitude to our friends from the Aarhus Secretariat: Ella, Fiona, Theo and the rest of the team, as well as our colleagues from UNEP, who have been always available to support the Latin America and the Caribbean initiative on developing a regional instrument on environmental rights and strengthen the environmental democracy around the globe.

ECLAC and Access Rights

- Let me begin by saying that one should not be surprised by the emergence of this type of process in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- During the past twenty years the region has made important steps: Between 1990 and 2013 poverty fell by 20 percentage points, from 48,4% to 27,9%. Economic growth is now quite stable and for the first time a financial crisis hardly affected the region; the middle class is growing as well as access to education and health. Democratic systems and institutions are consolidated in countries which had been devastated by civil war or in the grid of dictatorial regimes no so many years ago. Citizens are now more concerned about their rights and responsibilities and are claiming a place in the decision-making process that affects them and that the benefits of the economic development be shared as well as demanding a new development paradigm.
- The increasing number of socio-environmental conflicts with regard to the use and extraction of natural resources are a clear reflection of the difficulties in moving towards this new style of development that governs economic growth intelligently and even out the unequal distribution of environmental impacts and the economic benefits.
- We at ECLAC have pointed out that the Latin America and Caribbean region has come to a crossroads. Difficulties have been encountered in sustaining the advances made or pursuing them beyond certain limits. The region is still facing key challenges such as the need to reduce persistent inequalities, improve the governance of natural resources, and achieve inclusive development as well as environmental sustainability. The global challenges of climate change, coupled with the dynamics of consumption and urban concentration, pose serious negative environmental externalities that undermine the economy and the well-being of the population.
- The wide array of challenges the region is facing has led ECLAC to underline the importance of reaching compacts for equality and a sustainable future. We have stated that these compacts will not be possible without more participatory and transparent democracies in which citizens are deeply involved in deciding what type of society is to be built.

- In this context, we are convinced that Principle 10 is more relevant today than ever since it clearly advocates transparency, environmental justice and access to information as a basis for deepening democracy and overcoming global and local asymmetries.

The strengthening of environmental democracy: a common goal for Europe and LAC countries

- We are at a crucial moment. The Governments of the Latin American and Caribbean region are to agree in November of this year on the nature and contents of a regional instrument on Principle 10 –some of them have already publicly expressed their will of adopting a legally binding agreement while others are conducting national consultations-. The cooperation and exchange of information with our sister regional commission, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, and the signatory countries of the Aarhus Convention, would be paramount and greatly appreciated. This is the right moment to get involved in this regional process, in line with the Almaty guidelines, and help maintain the current impulse and the political will strong.
- We share the same goal, that is to place the Principle 10 implementation at the heart of the global post 2015 development agenda in order to guarantee that all persons in our planet, including vulnerable groups and the poor, have access to reliable environmental information and can participate in decisions which affect their lives, placing equality at the core of sustainable development.
- Let me finalize by inviting you to the IV Meeting of the Signatory countries of Declaration on Principle 10 in Latin America and the Caribbean, to be held in Santiago, Chile, between the 4 and 6 of November, 2014 at ECLAC's headquarters.
- Thank you very much for your attention.