

16th meeting of the Working Group of the Parties under the Aarhus Convention

June 19 2013

First of all I would like to thank you for the opportunity to share the achievements to date from our regional process. We are proud of these achievements but above all, they compelled us to maintain serious ambition and commitment.

As most of you recall, during the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) we proposed to initiate a dialogue on the implementation of Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration of 1992, this exercise was affirmed in a text signed, at that time, for 10 nations which had from the beginning the support of ECLAC. In the Declaration, we acknowledged that commitments were needed to ensure proper fulfillment of the rights of access to information, participation and justice regarding environmental issues.

Four months after Rio+20, in Santiago we celebrated the First meeting of the focal points appointed by the Governments of the signatory countries, which also included civil society experts and representatives from international organizations. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the support of the Aarhus Convention Secretariat and, in particular, the commitment and work of Fiona Marshall. The participant countries at this first meeting, determined to have a regional instrument and aware of the challenges, adopted a roadmap to promote a fluid dialogue in close collaboration with stakeholders. The Roadmap set concrete goals and assigned the presiding officers –Chile, the Dominican Republic and Mexico—the task of preparing a draft Plan of Action to 2014.

Consequently, the Second Focal Points meeting held in Guadalajara, México, last April 2013, was aimed at presenting and adopting the Plan of Action to 2014. I would like to stress that during this exercise to foster genuine dialogue in the region, at the meeting the floor was unprecedentedly given in the order requested without distinguishing whether or not it was a Government delegate. In the same spirit, for the detailed analysis of the proposed Plan of Action, an open contact group was established, where delegates from observer countries (Argentina and El Salvador) as well as representatives from the experts of the public were invited to participate. This ultimately allowed for the adoption by acclamation of a Plan of Action that will guide our work until 2014.

The Plan sets out a series of tasks to perform, such as promoting the Declaration and incorporate new signatories into the process; strengthening and highlighting the progress made in the region on rights of access to information, participation and justice; promoting the active participation of the public at the national level, and moving towards the formulation of a regional instrument by the establishment of two working groups: one on capacity building and cooperation, and other on rights of access and a regional instrument. In addition, we opted for a broad definition of the public so as to achieve the maximum possible participation and inclusion. We had significant input from the document prepared by ECLAC regarding the current situation, perspectives and good practices on access rights in the region. This will enable us to advance our work. Let me

take this opportunity to reiterate my thanks to the invaluable support and commitment of ECLAC.

I would like to stress that is the opinion of Chile, as chair of this initiative that the Plan of Action adopted is an excellent document of consensus. Through it, we believe that the signatory countries give a clear political signal that we are working in a responsible, transparent and effective way. This is ultimately a concrete and open Plan of Action, that recognizes the particular circumstances of nations while at the same time benefits all in the internal implementation of Principle 10 and allow us to move towards a regional instrument.

After less than a year since we launched this initiative and after intense collective work, I would like to highlight that the initiative has grown in term of its membership and presence in the international agenda. To date we have the participation of 14 signatory countries allowing us to potentially benefit more that 450 million people. In recent months, Brazil, Colombia, Honduras and Trinidad and Tobago joined the commitment of Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Dominican Republic and Uruguay, and we hope other nations would join. We believe that the more countries will join this effort, the greater relevance and weight will have the mechanisms we seek to agree to promote access rights in our region.

International support has been presented in statements from the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) and CELAC-EU in January this year and the process has been presented in events such as the last Governing Council of UNEP (Nairobi, February 2013), the Regional Conference on Freedom of Information in the Commonwealth Caribbean (Jamaica, March 2013) and the Conference on Sustainable Development in Latin American and the Caribbean: Follow up to the development agenda beyond 2015 and Rio+20 and the Caribbean Forum: Shaping a Sustainable Development Agenda to address the Caribbean reality in the 21st century (Bogotá, March 2013). ECLAC can be added to this list as it has provided resources and expertise along with the explicit support of UNEP and the working groups of the Aarhus Convention as well as various social organizations and experts.

Today, we face complex environmental challenges that directly affect our well-being and development, and which we must deal with responsibly and with a clear vision. We cannot ignore the many environmental conflicts occurring in our region that are due to the poor interaction between the parties involved. The successful implementation of this principle is the most effective and legitimate way to address both national challenges and the objectives of multilateral environmental agreements and, indeed, to address the tasks demanded of us by the implementation of “The future we want”.

We believe that today through this process, we have a valuable and promising opportunity to deepen access rights to promote greater social inclusion and fair and sustainable access and exchanges of social goods and services. We intend to address together peaceful means for channeling interests, concerns, demands and exchange experiences and best practices, in order to respond adequately, to the legitimate demands of the stakeholders, to the environmental challenges and to strengthen our democratic systems. We hope to continue learning about the experience of the Aarhus Convention. We believe we still have much to learn from your instrument, and certainly appreciate the important contributions to this shared goal, which unites us as regions, which is to honor the full implementation of Principle 10.

Thank you very much again for this opportunity to address you.