

ECLAC Statement – 18 June 2015

Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention (Geneva, 18 June 2015).

Welcome remarks

- Thank you Madame Chair. I would like to especially thank the Aarhus Convention Secretariat for inviting ECLAC to speak at the Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention.
- As you know, at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), held in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012, the Declaration on the application of Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development was signed. In this Declaration, 10 signatory countries committed, with the support of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UN ECLAC) as technical secretariat, to advance the implementation of a regional agreement for the full implementation of the rights of access to information, public participation and access to justice in environmental matters.
- The process has been making progress through regular meetings and the adoption of documents. Between 2012 and 2014, four meetings of the focal points of the signatory countries and fourteen meetings of working groups were held. In addition, during this period the Road Map, the Plan of Action, the Lima Vision and an annotated index of topics of the instrument (San José Content) were adopted.
- In November 2014, the countries launched the negotiation phase of the regional agreement and established a Negotiating Committee with a view to concluding its functions by December 2016. To begin negotiations, countries requested ECLAC to prepare a preliminary document on the regional instrument to be presented at the first meeting of the Committee.
- The first meeting of the negotiating committee was held last May, 2015 in Santiago. With the incorporation at the meeting of Antigua and Barbuda as a signatory country of the Declaration on Principle 10, the number of

nations in the region adhering to this process rises to 20. The process itself is open to all Latin American and the Caribbean countries.

- We are at a crucial moment. During the first meeting of the negotiating committee, delegates agreed to begin a process of internal national consultations on the preliminary document prepared by ECLAC and present their observations on the document before August 31st. They also agreed to negotiate Preamble and articles 1 to 10 at the second meeting of the negotiating committee which will take place in October 2015 in Panama. It is expected that the rest of the articles would be addressed at the next negotiating committee meeting to be held in Uruguay in March 2016.
- I take this opportunity to thank Mr. Jerzy Jendroska, member of the Aarhus Compliance Committee, who attended the First Meeting of the Negotiating Committee of the Regional Agreement and provided extremely valuable comments on the preliminary document of the regional agreement based on 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 and her team, who have been always available to support the Latin America and the Caribbean initiative on developing a regional instrument on environmental rights.
- At this stage, to support countries to conduct national consultations would be key to allow Latin American and Caribbean countries fully prepare to embark upon the negotiations of a regional instrument that effectively contribute to guarantee the full application of the access rights enshrined in Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration. The cooperation and support of our sister regional commission, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, as well as the signatory countries of the Aarhus Convention, would be paramount and greatly appreciated to help maintain the current impulse and the political will strong.
- For ECLAC the ultimate objective of the regional agreement must be the strengthening of environmental governance and the realization the right to

live in a healthy and sustainable environment through the full application in Latin American and the Caribbean of the access rights enshrined in Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration, under an approach based on cooperation and capacity building that enables the Parties to improve their laws, policies, institutions and practices to guarantee that those rights are fully observed and implemented.

- Therefore, capacity building would be also our priority in the near future, something which offers a myriad of opportunities for bilateral/regional cooperation among Aarhus Parties and the Latin America and the Caribbean region.
- I take this opportunity to specially mention the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC)'project *building bridges*, that with the support of the Government of The Netherlands, have favoured the exchange of experiences between regions and provided assistance to Latin America and the Caribbean civil society organizations to be an equal partner during the negotiations of the agreement. This has proven to be key, and will continue to do so, to ensure significant participation by all concerned citizens as declared by States in the Principle 10 Declaration that initiated this process.
- Let me finalize by inviting you to Panama next October 2015, for the Second Meeting of the Negotiating Committee.
- Thank you very much for your attention.