

Statement by UN ECLAC

Twenty-second meeting of the Working Group of the Parties

to the Aarhus Convention (via video link)

19 June 2018, 11:20 am (Santiago time)

Welcome remarks

On behalf of the Executive Secretary of UNECLAC, Mrs. Alicia Bárcena, I would like to especially thank the Aarhus Convention Secretariat for providing ECLAC the opportunity to address the Parties at the Twenty-second Meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention.

The Escazú Agreement

As you know, on 4 March 2018 a groundbreaking pact on environmental matters – the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean, commonly named as Escazu Agreement – was adopted in the Latin America and the Caribbean region. This Aarhus-inspired agreement is the first environmental treaty of Latin America and the Caribbean and the only emerging out of Rio+20. It is also the first treaty serviced by ECLAC, adopted on the 70th anniversary of the regional commission.

The “Escazú Agreement” is the remarkable result of a process that began at the 2012 Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development and comes after nine meetings of the negotiating committee convened since 2014. Its main beneficiaries are the people of our region and the most vulnerable groups and communities. It aims

to ensure the right of all persons to be informed in a timely and adequate manner, can participate significantly in the decisions that affect their lives and their environment and find redress and remedy when such rights have been infringed.

The agreement, adopted precisely on the 20th anniversary of the Aarhus Convention has benefited from the exchange of experience with the UN ECE Aarhus Convention Secretariat, first legally binding convention on environmental democracy. We would like to express our recognition and high appreciation for the continuous support provided by the UNECE Aarhus Convention Secretariat to date –Ella and her team-- and by Mr. Jerzy Jendroska for sharing the institutional aspects and the experience of the Aarhus Convention and its innovative compliance mechanism with our region. Not least, we thank Aarhus Parties and civil society from your region for their assistance.

The Regional Agreement is reflective of the Latin American and Caribbean priorities and main concerns: it sets regional standards, affirming the value of the regional dimension of multilateralism for sustainable development, fosters capacity-building and regional cooperation, lays the foundations of a supporting institutional architecture and offers tools for improved policy- and decision-making. In so doing, it contributes to charting the pathway towards a new development model and tackles the region's unsustainable culture of fragmented interests, reaching those that have traditionally been underrepresented, excluded or marginalized, thus leaving no one behind.

Furthermore, having the Latin America subregion, as several reports indicate, the sad record of being the riskiest region in the world for those upholding rights relating to territory, the environment and access to land, the agreement also

requires States to guarantee a safe and enabling environment for persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters and to take measures to prevent, investigate and punish attacks, threats or intimidations to these individuals.

Both the Aarhus Convention and the Escazú Agreement put Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development into practice, and provide a comprehensive framework for governments to engage the public effectively in decision making on environmental matters and to respond the many challenges facing our world, from the degradation of the environment and ecosystems and the plundering of natural resources associated with today's production and consumption dynamics, compounded by urban concentration, to social inclusion and equality and eradicating poverty. These challenges are being exacerbated by global challenges such as climate change that greatly impact our region, particularly its vulnerable persons and groups.

Next steps

The Regional Agreement will open for signature and ratification of the 33 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on 27 September 2018 at UN headquarters in New York, coinciding with the Annual General Debate of the General Assembly. It will require 11 State Parties to enter into force. In the interim period, the member countries that served as the Presiding Officers of the negotiating committee (Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Mexico, Peru, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Trinidad and Tobago) will continue to steer and conduct the necessary work, with signatory countries, significant participation by the public and with the support of ECLAC as its technical secretariat.

Governments and Civil Society around the region are working together to build momentum for ratification. International cooperation to help countries of our region get ready to implement the future agreement is most needed. The exchange of experiences between regions and the provision of assistance to Latin America and the Caribbean proved to be key for countries and the public to actively participate in the shape of the agreement and it is now needed to build the capacities for ratification and implementation. The cooperation and advisory support from the Aarhus Convention secretariat, Parties and civil society will be paramount.

Environmental Democracy and the 2030 Development Agenda

The timing for intensifying the full application of Principle 10 could not be more appropriate. The rights of access enshrined in this principle are at the heart of the 2030 Agenda and permeate and are manifested in all the sustainable development goals. The SDGs expressly link human well-being with environmental quality and peace. Five goals address environmental matters (SDGs 6, 12, 13, 14 and 15) and well-being based on the environment is present in the targets of all the other goals. In addition, goal 16, which promotes just, peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, requires that officials guarantee equality in access to justice; effective, responsible and transparent institutions; and the adoption of inclusive, participatory and representative decisions. In this context, the mechanisms and instruments established for ensuring Principle 10 effective application are key elements of the accountability scheme of the 2030 Agenda.