

Opening remarks at the LAC Forum of Ministers of Environment

Leo Heileman – Regional Director and Representative

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Your Excellency, Ms. Mia Amor Mottley, Prime Minister of Barbados
Honourable Adrian Forde, Minister of Environment and National Beautification of Barbados
Honourable Ministers of the Environment, Ambassadors, and country representatives
Executive Director of UNEP Ms. Inger Anderson.
Executive Secretary of ECLAC Ms. Alicia Barcena.
Commissioner for the Environment of the European Union, Mr. Virginijus Sinkevicius
Heads of United Nations Offices and Conventions
Heads and Representatives of regional and multilateral institutions,
Representatives of Civil Society, the private sector, financial institutions, and academia.
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Es un placer y un gran honor estar hoy con ustedes en este Foro tan importante.

Como Secretaria del Foro de Ministros de Medio Ambiente de América Latina y el Caribe, y en nombre del Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Medio Ambiente, quiero expresar nuestro más profundo agradecimiento a Barbados y en particular al Ministro Forde por su liderazgo y dedicación como Presidente de este Foro, así a todos los miembros del bureau del Foro, Oficiales de Alto Nivel y representantes de los países que durante los últimos meses trabajaron incansablemente en las negociaciones y preparativos de esta Vigésima Segunda XXII Reunión del Foro.

Expreso nuestra solidaridad con todos los países de la región, por el inmenso sufrimiento que la pandemia COVID-19 ha traído a toda nuestra gente, así como a quienes han sufrido pérdidas y devastaciones por huracanes, inundaciones, deslizamientos de tierra, incendios y otros desastres.

Este encuentro refleja la importancia de los temas ambientales para los gobiernos de América Latina y el Caribe y demuestra la confianza en el multilateralismo para acordar metas comunes y trabajar juntos hacia soluciones regionales.

La pandemia llegó en un momento en que el mundo ya estaba lidiando con los impactos de la triple crisis planetaria: la crisis del cambio climático, la crisis de degradación del hábitat y la pérdida de biodiversidad, y la crisis de contaminación generalizada. La recuperación de los impactos socioeconómicos y en la salud de la pandemia de COVID-19 también debe abordar estas otras crisis de manera integrada.

Ahora continuo mi discurso en Ingles.

Despite significant progress in environmental policies and measures over the last decades, multiple negative trends persist that demand urgent attention and collective action. Two recent assessment by UNEP Cartagena Convention Secretariat showed widespread pollution and habitat degradation in the Caribbean Sea. The forest area in the LAC region is declining. The latest Living Planet Index showed that our region suffered the highest biodiversity loss worldwide, with 94 percent of the populations of mammals, birds, fish, reptiles and amphibians in Latin America and the Caribbean declining. This is attributed to a combination of factors including changes in land and sea use, habitat loss and degradation, over-exploitation, invasive species, climate change and pollution. Such changes, in turn, are linked to declines in food, water, energy and health reflecting the ongoing reduction of nature's ability to contribute to human quality of life across the region.

This is in sharp contrast with the economic value of nature's contributions. The Intergovernmental Science Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services - IPBES Assessment for the Americas, estimated that terrestrial ecosystems deliver services valued at least US \$24.3 trillion per year, equivalent to the region's gross domestic product. The International Labour Organization ILO has projected that circular economy could generate 4.8 million green jobs in the region by 2030. The UNEP Zero Carbon report for the region estimates that a transition to renewable energy and electric mobility will create over 35 million new jobs by 2050. In addition to job creation, decarbonization and sustainable consumption and production could also help address problems such as the 145,000 tonnes of solid waste that end up in open dumps across the region every day. Latin America and the Caribbean is the second most disaster-prone region on the planet with up to 20% increase in climate change related extreme events over the last 3 decades. A stable climate is critical for us. Major investments in ecosystem-based approaches and environment friendly solutions will be essential to close the adaptation gap in Latin America and the Caribbean.

It is precisely in this context that this Ministerial Forum, under the leadership of Barbados, aims at positioning the action for the climate, for nature, and for a pollution free planet at the center of the region's sustainable recovery pathways.

In the preparatory meetings for this Forum, countries identified priorities and achieved consensus on regional plans to accelerate the response towards climate objectives; sustainable consumption and production and circular economy; conservation, restoration and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystems; the implementation of waste management, pollution control and plastics reduction; the integration of environmental data and information in decision making; gender equality and the environment; and the response to environmental emergencies and crisis.

The discussions, exchanges and agreements that Ministers of Environment will have over these two days will be critical in helping us emerge from the crisis, with the conviction and commitment to a development pathway that is sustainable.

The decisions and actions by this Forum will deliver the mandate and direction to put the region on track towards an environmentally sustainable recovery that provides solutions for our people and for nature, to which our survival is inextricably linked.

This Forum will respond to the call from civil society, particularly the youth, who clearly see their destinies and their hopes linked to a healthy environment. It will also provide the region's input into the fifth session of the UN Environment Assembly in three weeks' time.

I take great pleasure in mentioning the entry into force of the Escazú Agreement on Access to information, Public participation, and access to environmental justice. Congratulations on this major regional environmental agreement. Achieving its objectives throughout the region is our collective responsibility, and furthermore, will honor all the people who pursue a healthier and safer environment for all.

I convey my assurances of the continued commitment of UNEP, to work jointly with the rest of the UN System, in serving the countries to overcome the current challenges, and to achieve a peaceful, more prosperous and sustainable future for the region.

We will work vigorously to support the implementation of your decisions

Thank you, Mr. President.

Muchisimas gracias,

Merci beaucoup.

Muito Obrigado.

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