

XXII Meeting of the Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean

REGIONAL FORUM OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND MAJOR GROUPS OF LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Friday, January 29, 2021

Background

The Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean convened its XXII Meeting on 1-2 February to decide on regional priorities of the environmental agenda and to coordinate actions and cooperation on these issues.

As part of the preparatory process for the Meeting of the Forum of Ministers and the Fifth United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA 5), several meetings of Civil Society and Major Groups engaged in a consultative process to contribute to the respective agendas and to give voice to the Group.

A consultative meeting of Civil Society took place on 23 November 2020, coordinated by the elected Regional Facilitators Lorena Terrazas and Joseph Severe. The meeting brought together Major Groups and Stakeholders (MGS) accredited to UNEP as well as non-accredited regional Major Groups and Stakeholders partners, including participants from foundations or other relevant Stakeholders, as the main purpose was to motivate participation of all parts and bring them to a more active engagement. Based on the outcomes of the meeting, an inclusive process for the preparation of the regional statement for UNEA-5 was undertaken by virtual exchange during December 2020. A virtual consultation took place on 29 January as a prelude to the XXII Meeting of the Forum of Ministers.

Objectives

The main objectives of the Regional Forum were:

- To present the key messages and contributions from the Civil Society of the Latin America and the Caribbean region on the environmental agenda in the context of the Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean.
- To share updated information on the preparation of the XXII Meeting of the Forum and the Assembly.

- To reinforce dialogue and coordination for increasing Civil Society and Youth participation and engagement in the regional and global environmental agenda.

Opening Remarks by Mr. Leo Heileman

Mr. Leo Heileman Director of the UNEP Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean opened the Forum by thanking participants for their contributions to the participation dialogue processes afforded by UNEP to Civil Society and Major Groups. It speaks to citizens' right to participate in decision-making in environmental matters (as Principle 10 of the Rio de Janeiro Declaration articulated almost thirty years). As such, UNEP's main interest is to promote spaces for the participation of Civil Society, Major Groups and Stakeholders.

He said that Civil Society has the knowledge and experience of the environmental agenda and many are in close contact with communities and can bring diverse voices from across the region. Interaction between UNEP and Civil Society over the last decade has grown and more than 500 non-governmental organizations globally already have formal consultative status. His wish was for the number of organizations in the region to grow and for their involvement to be increasingly substantive while reflecting the fantastic cultural diversity of the region.

He noted the important contribution of the perspectives of Civil Society Forum to the Forum of Ministers of the Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean which followed and whose main topic was "the Environmental Dimension of the Sustainable Recovery of COVID-19 in the Region". The COVID-19 pandemic is an economic crisis, a humanitarian crisis, a security crisis and a human rights crisis, all of which pose many difficulties in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. This crisis has highlighted serious weaknesses and inequalities within and between nations. Getting out of this crisis will require a whole-of-society, whole-of-government and whole-world approach driven by compassion and solidarity, as the United Nations Secretary-General has said.

The COVID-19 crisis has exposed consumption and production trends that affect ecosystems, nature and the animals that humans depend on for our economy, social well-being and to reduce hunger and poverty. Climate change, the loss of nature and the need to achieve more resource efficiency and reduce pollution have been brought to the forefront. As such, there must be integrated solutions to the crisis, without which, the recovery and start-up of the economies will lead the region down a path with more serious effects than those of COVID-19.

The Director noted that the environmental challenge is an urgent problem but also a great opportunity. The region is one of the most mega-diverse regions in the world and has a vast natural heritage. In addition to hosting 8 of the 17 mega-diverse countries in the world, located in the

Andes-Amazon basin and in Mesoamerica, it has unique ecosystems, marine biodiversity and two primary regions of crop diversity.

Production and consumption patterns are seriously affecting the region's natural heritage and putting its future at risk: rebuilding better requires transforming the development model of Latin America and the Caribbean.

He urged bold and imaginative thinking for an integrated approach to innovation and circular economy, linking various aspects, and changing the structural elements and allowing a transition to a new model. It must continue to integrate the environmental, social and economic dimensions. The region must continue to move aggressively towards decarbonizing the economy and increasing resource efficiency, while building resilience and generating green jobs.

In this context, preparations for the Meeting of the XXII Forum of Ministers of the Environment have been driven by the need to reflect on the environmental dimensions of the crisis and make a call to action so that the environment is at the center of recovery.

The Director applauded the entry into force of the Escazú Agreement on access to information, public participation and access to environmental justice. He congratulated the countries of the region and all those who worked tirelessly to make the Agreement a reality, both through active participation in the negotiation process but also in the domestic sphere by putting the issue on the agenda of decision-makers.

Welcome from the Presidency by Minister Adrian Forde

President of the XXII Meeting of the Forum of Ministers, the Honourable Adrian Forde, Minister of Environment and National Beautification of Barbados then addressed participants.

He noted that the two focus areas of the Civil Society Forum were reflective of the theme of the XXII Meeting of the Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean, namely: 1. The Environmental Dimensions of the COVID-19 and 2. Strengthening Regional Cooperation and Collaboration among Civil Society Groups in Latin America and the Caribbean.

He mentioned the successful completion of eight Decisions of the Ministerial Forum and the Bridgetown Declaration which he noted as significant outcomes of the Forum. He noted that the Communique on COVID-19 was embedded in the Declaration. He expressed the hope that the Civil Society Forum would have the time to reflect on these outcomes and most importantly, their implementation.

Minister Forde reflected on the difficult circumstances under which the Forums were being held and thanked participants for their engagement in the processes. He noted that COVID-19 exposed certain weaknesses in countries of the region and at the same time, it under-scored the need for greater cooperation between people of Latin America and the Caribbean. In this regard, he said it was noteworthy that one of the topics of the Dialogues in the Civil Society Forum was focused on enhancing cooperation of Civil Society groups in the region. His wish as the Presidency was for greater cooperation and interaction among peoples of the region to be promoted. He noted the important role of the Non-Governmental groups which could be a vehicle for making this cooperation a reality and challenged the group to come up with meaningful programmes and initiatives.

He noted that the Decade of Ecosystem Restoration as declared by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) could be a starting point; that emphasis be placed on youth in the region and that Ministers in the region would welcome these initiatives which target youth. He urged the Forum to give consideration to the development of the Youth Green Jobs Initiative.

He then mentioned the significance of the role of Indigenous Peoples in the mega-diverse region whose traditional knowledge about its natural resources could be used to protect and create sustainable livelihoods.

Minister Forde then closed by offering the support of the Ministers' Forum for initiatives and outcomes of the Civil Society Forum.

Remarks by the Chief Civil Society Unit, UNEP Nairobi, Mr. Alexander Juras

Mr. Juras outlined the process to UNEA 5 and the fact that it was now split into two parts; part one will be conducted on the February 2021 through a virtual meeting where the focus would be on the operational aspects such as UNEP's budget and work programme; the second part will be in-person in 2022 and will deal with substantive matter regarding the UNEA themes and the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. He outlined various opportunities for engagement in the preparatory process for Civil Society, Major Groups and other stakeholders such as the Youth Environmental Assembly, the Scientific Business Forum and the Meeting of Permanent Representatives to UNEP. He indicated that there will be an international consultation of Major Groups in June 2021. He lamented the fact that in the past, there was limited participation of groups from Latin America and the Caribbean. He closed by encouraging the Group to become more engaged, drawing on the lesson from the COVID-19 pandemic, that international problems require international solutions. The Forum consisted of two Dialogues with a cross-section of representation from Civil Society Groups and Major Stakeholders.

Organization of the Forum

The Forum was organized around two Dialogues consisting of a representative number of panelists and an opportunity for comments and questions by participants. (Agenda is attached at Annex I).

The Dialogues were entitled:

Dialogue I: “The Environmental Dimensions of the COVID-19 for a Sustainable Recovery in Latin America and the Caribbean: Civil Society as a driver of change for leaving no one behind” and

Dialogue II: “Towards a strong and active role of Civil Society and the Youth in shaping and implementing the environmental dimension of sustainable development”.

The two moderators of the Forum were Ms. Lorenza Terrazas of the Red Paz, Integración y Desarrollo (PAZINDE) of Bolivia and Mr. Joseph Severe Union des Amis Socio Culturels d’Action en Développement (UNASCAD) of Haiti. (Mr. Severe had internet connection difficulties and could not intervene).

Main Points

Dialogue I was moderated by Lorena Terrazas.

The first panelist was Ms. Nicole Leotaud of the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) who presented on “Priorities for a Green, Inclusive and Resilient COVID-19 Recovery”. The main points were:

1. There should be interactive governance through an integrated, coherent and whole -of-society approach.
2. Investments in recovery efforts from the impacts of COVID-19 should be inclusive, environmentally sustainable, low-carbon and climate resistance and geared to stimulate the economy.
3. Caribbean economies which are mostly tourism dependent have been hard hit according to statistics generated by ECLAC and the IMF).
4. While there have been small initiatives towards recovery in some Caribbean countries, there have not been any major investments to date.

5. There is a need to focus investment on rural, nature-based efforts especially as they relate to the micro- and informal sectors and in youth entrepreneurship.
6. The Decade of Ecosystem Restoration presents a potential opportunity for prioritizing ecosystem as natural capital which is the foundation for building economic development and protecting human health.

Mr. Andrés Abecasis of the Avina Foundation spoke on behalf of Mr. Gabriel Baracatt. The main points of his statement were:

1. The COVID-19 crisis arose during other existing crises such as the environmental crisis, the crisis of inequality and the crisis of democracy. The region must resist the temptation to choose which of those be resolved first. The recovery strategy must be comprehensive and integrated across all levels.
2. The use of advances in science and technology to reduce inequality in populations should be based on ethics; the need for science and technology to drive the recovery efforts must be recognized.
3. Civil Society has a fundamental role in the successful and sustainable post-pandemic recovery. Emphasis should be placed on solutions devised by communities, neighborhoods and especially small businesses which provide everything that communities need to survive. Before solutions by the State are tried, recovery strategies must consider the social structure, focusing on community- level solutions.

Ms. Dalia Márquez presented on behalf of the Latin America and the Caribbean Engagement Mechanism (LACEMOS) supported by Mr. Pedro Cunha.

She presented on the results of the collaborative work of different LAC organizations which had taken place the day before in a dialogue promoted by LACEMOS. She provided the following inputs:

1. The COVID-19 pandemic brought problems for LAC not only in economic terms but also at the sanitary level. These issues mentioned were the increasing deterioration of ecosystems due to environmental crimes such as deforestation: the persecution of environmental activists, the absence of mechanisms for legal defense of the environment, the violation of human rights, the precarious sanitary conditions for some vulnerable populations in the region and the increase in migrant caravans, among other aspects.
2. Infectious diseases are linked to the loss of ecosystems and the lack of harmonization between our lifestyle and that of all other species that inhabit the planet. For years, science

has been predicting a crisis like this pandemic and unfortunately for decades, no attention was paid to it. It is essential that the suggestions of the scientific sector be heard, and real actions be taken with the involvement of Civil Society.

3. The pandemic has shown that LAC is a very unequal region and that the most vulnerable people will always be the most affected.
4. Comprehensive post-pandemic recovery plans in the region must include key stakeholders in the application of solutions. These are the Civil Society empowered and organized, the State and the private sector.
5. In the post-pandemic recovery period, Civil Society must assume an active role to continue promoting and working from the local level, for which the State must guarantee conditions, protection and rights.

Ms. Danielle Andrade, elected representative of the Public, Escazú Agreement, presented some relevant highlights:

1. The Escazú Agreement is an important treaty which speaks to environmental democracy in LAC based on fundamental human rights. These include, among others: a) Access to Information, b) Public Participation and c) Access to Justice.
2. It comes into force on 22 April 2021 and is open to 33 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean and takes a people-centered approach to environmental protection. The public have certain rights and that includes vulnerable groups.
3. The Agreement has provided for access to information and participation in environmental decision-making regarding access to justice in environmental management. It has detailed provisions for procedures to access information held by public authorities and opportunities to participate in decisions regarding the use of natural resources. There are also means of recourse where there are breaches.
4. Ms Andrade further elaborated that without a healthy environment, public health is under threat; that one cannot speak about sanitation and battling COVID-19 when people do not have access to clean water.
5. When people have access to information, it leads to better decisions about the environment and their own health. Participation in environmental decision requires transparency. Access to justice needs means having the tools to hold those accountable for breaching those rights mentioned.

6. One article of relevance is Article 7 which requires states to immediately disseminate information that can help in reducing the potential damage from threats to public health and the environment.
7. The Escazú Agreement speaks to transparent governance which would make it open to all, recovery measures and the use of funds. There must be partnerships between Civil Society and the government.
8. Many of the rights outlined in the Agreement are fundamental to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
9. Countries must strengthen laws and democratic institutions and make them more transparent and inclusive, thereby protecting basic human rights and to keep the promise of a better future for generations to come.

The next presenter was Mr. César Artiga, Coordinator of the National Advancing Team of the Escazú Agreement in El Salvador. The main points made by Mr. Artiga were:

1. There is a difference between maintainable and sustainable. In general, maintainable is like gaining time, while being sustainable represents a lasting solution.
2. Production and consumption patterns must be transformed to see real changes in the dynamics we are experiencing.
3. The great costs of the current crises are already being paid by groups and populations that have historically and systematically been left behind, and that live in unequal conditions.
4. The ministers should leave this Forum with actions that show a sense of urgency and which confirm their commitment to the implementation of the Escazú Agreement, in compliance with updates of the national contributions established by the Paris Agreement, for example.
5. The main means of implementing agreements is with the participation of citizens. If people are not educated about the importance of their participation, there will be no possible solutions.

Dialogue II: “Towards a strong and active role of Civil Society and the Youth in shaping and implementing the environmental dimension of sustainable development”.

This Dialogue was moderated by Carmen Capriles.

The first presenter was Ms. Kiefer Jackson of the Caribbean Youth Environment Network (CYEN). The main points of her intervention discussions were:

1. Education on environmental issues must move from the pseudo academic realm to the practical and environmental management needs to be embedded in popular culture to support behavioral change.
2. Investment in science and engineering sectors that will promote research founded on the creation of Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) systems and engagement of the youth in SCP through building of their skills.
3. The inclusion of Gender and Environment is critical in the recovery process. There must be gender-sensitive investments to ensure that policies, programmes and plans can contribute to gender equality.
4. Education systems must focus on produce learning strategies on aspects of ecosystems management; engagement of youth in actions for Sustainable Consumption and Production where many opportunities exist.
5. Develop policies that support the importance of Education and Training on natural resources, based on entrepreneurial opportunities for young women.
6. Youth are the barometer of society's conscience as young people have the most to lose.

Mr. Pedro Cunha of the Latin American and Caribbean Engagement Mechanism (LACEMOS) made the following points on participation in the UNEA process:

1. The importance of an informed participation of Civil Society, taking advantage of existing training opportunities in platforms such as InforMEA (<https://www.informe.org>), a UN Environment portal.
2. Each decision-making space within the main groups has its own participation mechanisms in Civil Society issues and to achieve their participation, organizations must be accredited to UNEP.
3. LACEMOS is a self-organized body that seeks to integrate the territories, Major Groups, and topics to work in an integrated manner on Civil Society issues and processes in the region, promoting the environmental dimension in all spaces.

4. One of the topics of the Escazú Agreement is the protection of environmental activists and it is regrettable that crimes committed towards people dedicated to protecting the environment continue to occur.

Mr. Paul Giovanni Rodríguez represented Mr. Max Trejo of the International Youth Organization for Ibero-America. The main topics covered were:

1. Post-pandemic effects seem to be displacing, in a manner, the subjects of the 2030 agenda. Efforts must be unified so that both agendas are integrated into a process of sustainable development where health impacts and environmental impacts are taken care of equally.
2. Youth participation in discussions of environmental matters must be strengthened so that trust in institutions and international organizations recovers, given the current crisis of institutional legitimacy questioned by the performance of the authorities in activities to fight COVID-19.
3. Local youth participation is important to generate processes that escalate to national dialogues, where the youth participate in the generation of policies, laws and processes.
4. The International Treaty on Youth Rights is a strong instrument of protection, public opinion and generation of policies related to the protection of the environment.
5. The participation of the youth at the institutional level in dialogue and agreement efforts on environmental issues is a key factor.

Ms. Ana Julia Virhuez Montero of the Red Paz, Integración y Desarrollo (PAZINDE) covered these main topics:

1. Waste and deforestation are two aspects that currently affect the environmental crisis the most. We must find a balance between the needs of people and the needs of the planet.
2. Environmental education in schools is necessary to raise awareness and inform about the needs of the planet and to do what is within the power of people to restore the health of the environment. Even though these are small things, they make a big difference and help change paradigms.

Ms. Xiomara Acevedo of Barranquilla +20 made a presentation in which the main points emerged were the following:

1. Participation must be at the center of the development processes that has been promoted in the region and as a fundamental right. She noted that the consultations had reached a point but without significantly more young people being involved. Having demonstrated the importance of involving young people in these matters, steps must be taken to ensure that these spaces for participation of youth and children continue to exist.
2. Young people are at the point where they can take significant action that can produce transformational leadership, especially at the local level.
3. It must be a commitment of the State to provide more equitable financing to promote the work of young people and children, stressing their right to participation and implement initiatives without putting themselves at risk in the process.

(Lorena Terrazas tried to get the intervention of the other Regional Facilitator, Mr. Joseph Severe, but he was not connected at that moment due to connectivity problems reported from the beginning of the event).

The Way Forward

The Presidency of the Forum challenged the Civil Society group to identify develop action-oriented proposals to promote cooperation in Civil Society between Latin America and the Caribbean and to bring the two together. The Group was urged specially to focus on youth so that these proposals can be placed before the Forum of Ministers to assist with resource mobilization. This will strengthen the Forum. The Presidency also urged the Group to consider the role of Indigenous People especially in the Decade of Ecosystem Restoration since there are opportunities to build back better through concrete actions. In essence there is a need to better integrate the regions' programmes through active cooperation.

Important links

- Regional Forum of Civil Society and Major Groups of Latin America and the Caribbean: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mLiiYU0JSZQ>
- Message from Lorena Terrazas, Regional Facilitator of Major Groups and Stakeholders, Latin America and the Caribbean <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KcbwNek9qY0>
- Civil Society engagement: <https://www.unenvironment.org/civil-society-engagement>
- Accreditation to UNEP: <https://www.unenvironment.org/civil-society-engagement/accreditation>
- XXII Forum of Ministers of the Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean: <https://www.unenvironment.org/events/unep-event/xxii-forum-ministers-environment-latin-america-and-caribbean>
- UNEA-5 portal: <https://environmentassembly.unenvironment.org/unea5>

Annex I

Opening	
Welcome remarks 15 min.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Leo Heileman, Regional Director and Representative, UN Environment Programme, UNEP. • Mr. Adrian R. Forde, Minister of Environment and National Beautification of Barbados and President of the Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean.
Introduction 15 min.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Alexander Juras - Chief, Civil Society Unit, UNEP
DIALOGUE I - The Environmental Dimensions of the COVID-19 for a Sustainable Recovery in Latin America and the Caribbean: Civil Society as a driver of change for leaving no one behind.	
Presentations and interactions 60 min.	<p>Moderator: Ms. Lorena Terrazas - Regional Facilitator UNEP</p> <p>Panelists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Nicole Leotaud - Caribbean Natural Resources Institute, CANARI. • Ms. Dalia Márquez - Latin American and the Caribbean Engagement Mechanism, LACEMOS. • Mr. Gabriel Baracatt - Avina Foundation. (Represented by Andrés Abecasis) • Ms. Danielle Andrade - Elected Representative of the Public, Escazú Agreement. • Mr. César Artiga - Coordinator of the National Advancing Team of the Escazú Agreement in El Salvador.
DIALOGUE II - Towards a strong and active role of Civil Society and the Youth in shaping and implementing the environmental dimension of sustainable development.	
Presentations and interactions 60 min.	<p>Moderator: Ms. Carmen Capriles - Reacción Climática</p> <p>Panelists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Kiefer Jackson - Caribbean Youth Environment Network, CYEN. • Mr. Pedro Cunha - Latin American and the Caribbean Engagement Mechanism, LACEMOS. • Mr. Max Trejo - International Youth Organization for Ibero-America, OIJ. • Ms. Ana Julia Virhuez Montero - PAZINDE/Red Paz, Integración y Desarrollo (Peace, Integration and Development Network). • Ms. Xiomara Acevedo - Barranquilla +20
Final comments 20 min.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation space moderated by Lorena Terrazas and Joseph Severe, Regional Facilitators