



Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean

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# **Meeting Report**

Meeting of the Bureau of the XXIII Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean

> May 4, 2023 San Jose, Costa Rica

## **Background**

The Bureau of the XXIII Forum Meeting was elected on February 2, 2021, during the closing session of the XXII Meeting of Ministers and Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean (the Forum), and is composed as follows: Costa Rica (presidency), Argentina, Barbados, Belize, Brazil, Colombia, Honduras, and Peru.

The meeting of the Bureau held on May 4, 2023, was convened in accordance with paragraph 35 of the <u>Bridgetown Declaration</u>: "The Bureau of the Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean shall oversee the functioning of the Forum together with the Regional Director of UNEP and, therefore, shall meet at least every six months to oversee, monitor, and examine the implementation of the Forum's outcomes and to direct the work of the Forum during the intersessional period."

## **Objetives**

The main objectives of this Bureau meeting were:

- 1. Review the Forum's roadmap for 2023, including approving dates, sharing the roadmap towards UNEA 6, and making decisions regarding the Forum's representation.
- 2. Consider outstanding aspects of the work of the Forum's Working Groups and Networks, in line with the decisions of its XXII meeting.
- 3. Provide and discuss updates within the framework of the Climate Change and Biodiversity Conventions, the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the plastics agreement, and the Presidency's proposal for the creation of a Regional Ocean Commission.

The Bureau provided guidance on the activities of the Working Groups and the Forum's roadmap in 2023, approving the dates for the XXIII Forum Meeting.

Furthermore, the Bureau engaged in a high-level dialogue and exchanged ideas on the region's position regarding key international processes related to climate change, plastics and marine pollution, biodiversity, and oceans.

The meeting was attended by the Secretariats of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), as well as Ambassador Majid Al Suwaidi, Special Representative of the COP 28 Presidency of the UNFCCC.

Additionally, Peru, as the President of the Bureau of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to develop an internationally legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, particularly in the marine environment (INC), addressed this topic.

## Agenda Item 1: Opening of the Meeting

The meeting began with welcoming remarks from the President of the Forum, Mr. Franz Tattenbach, Minister of Environment and Energy of Costa Rica. All member countries of the Bureau attended the meeting. Argentina, Barbados, Belize, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Honduras, and Peru were present in person. The complete list of participants is included in Annex I of this report.

Minister Tattenbach welcomed the members of the Bureau and Ambassador Majid Al Suwaidi, Special Representative of the COP 28 Presidency of the UNFCCC, who participated by invitation of the Presidency to share their vision and milestones towards COP 28. He thanked them for their participation and commitment to the work for the environment and well-being, including through the Forum and other platforms.

He then presented the objectives of the meeting. Firstly, to review the Forum's roadmap for 2023, including approving the dates, sharing the roadmap towards UNEA 6, and making decisions regarding the Forum's representation. Secondly, to consider outstanding aspects of the work of the Working Groups and Networks of the Forum, following up on the decisions of its XXII meeting. Thirdly, to share updates within the framework of the Climate Change and Biodiversity Conventions, the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the plastics agreement, and the proposal from the Presidency for the creation of a Regional Ocean Commission.

Next, Mr. Juan Bello, Regional Director and UNEP Representative, thanked Costa Rica for hosting another meeting of the Bureau and all participants for joining. He emphasized the need to continue collaborating to ensure sustainability, prosperity, and equity, using the Forum as a space to advance regional collaboration and beyond, as evidenced by the organization of the Latin America and Caribbean-European Union Ministerial Meeting scheduled to take place on the day following this Bureau meeting, on May 5th.

#### Agenda Item 2: Approval of the Agenda

The President presented document UNEP/LAC/B1-2023/Doc.1, Provisional Agenda, which was approved without modifications.

Belize suggested considering water management and water security at the regional level, considering it as a matter of great importance. It was agreed to add this item under Agenda Item 6, "Other matters."

## Agenda Item 3.1: Roadmap and approval of dates for the XXIII Forum Meeting

Under Agenda Item 3.1, the Secretariat presented the 2023 roadmap for the Forum, which was based on the roadmap approved by the Bureau in its previous meeting in October 2022, now including the proposed dates for the XXIII Forum Meeting.

The President thanked the Secretariat and then sought the opinions of the attendees, as well as their approval of the proposed dates for the XXIII Forum Meeting. The President also highlighted that the proposed dates offer multiple benefits, including synergies with the activities of the Regional Climate Week led by the UNFCCC Secretariat, cost reduction, more

efficient use of resources, and closer alignment with the intergovernmental climate change process. The President mentioned the lack of alternative dates and the kind offer from the Government of Panama to host the event.

Brazil indicated that there is a problem with the proposed date for the Bureau meeting on August 8th due to a conflict with the Amazon Summit and suggested delaying it by one week.

The President concluded this agenda item by thanking the members of the Bureau for their contributions and approving the dates for the XXIII Forum Meeting: October 23rd to 26th, 2023, to be held in Panama City, Panama.

Additionally, the President expressed gratitude to the Government of Panama for hosting the XXIII Forum Meeting and for the support they will provide for its realization.

## Agenda Item 3.2: Process towards UNEA 6

For Agenda Item 3.2, Mrs. Giovanna Valverde, Ambassador of Costa Rica to Kenya and Permanent Representative to UNEP, shared the roadmap approved by the Bureaus of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) and the Committee of Permanent Representatives (CRP) at their joint meeting on January 30, 2023.

Ambassador Valverde presented the global process that will be followed to develop the declaration to be adopted at UNEA 6 and invited those present to actively participate in the activities.

The President thanked Ambassador Valverde and invited participants to speak, but there were no comments. The President requested the Secretariat to share Ambassador Valverde's presentation through the website.

## Agenda Item 3.3: Representation of the Forum

Next, the President raised the issue of the representation of the Forum during sessions of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) and other relevant spaces. He indicated that it has been the practice for the outgoing President of the Forum to receive a mandate, through the Forum's Declaration, to represent it at the next UNEA meeting and similar spaces.

He further mentioned that this practice is not formalized, and the same applies to the Forum's representation in other areas, such as the Forum of Latin American and Caribbean Countries on Sustainable Development, the Conferences of the Parties to the Climate Change Conventions, or other environmental meetings where the President or their representative could intervene.

For this reason, he proposed formally agreeing that one of the functions of the Forum's Presidency should be its representation in other instances where regional and global environmental issues are considered, provided that such representation fulfills the

requirements of neutrality and impartiality inherent to the Presidency, where the expressed opinions should pertain to aspects of common interest and general agreement, based on the decisions and declarations of the Forum.

If there is agreement among the members of the Bureau, it would be proposed to include this decision as part of the Declaration of the XXIII Forum Meeting for approval by all countries in the region.

Belize expressed agreement with the proposal, and the other participants had no objections.

The President requested the Secretariat to reflect this decision in the draft Declaration of the XXIII Forum Meeting.

## Point 4 of the Agenda. Summary of progress in the Working Groups and Networks of the Forum

The President emphasized that the Working Groups and Networks operationalize the decisions made within the Forum and implement actions in response to those decisions. Hence, the importance of monitoring their activities.

He also expressed gratitude to the participants and representatives from all countries in the Working Groups and Networks for their work.

Next, the UNEP Secretariat presented the highlights of the work carried out by the Working Groups and Networks of the Forum since the last meeting of the Bureau in October 2022. The purpose was to report on the most relevant progress and receive guidance from the Bureau.

Brazil expressed interest in appointing representatives to some of the working groups.

Belize highlighted the importance of generating opportunities for exchange and trade, and recommended collaboration with universities and research institutions to capitalize on research progress in the environmental context.

Barbados offered to serve the Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region in terms of providing guidance on sustainable consumption and production strategies, in which they have expertise

Colombia emphasized the importance of thinking at a regional level and considering the central role of women's participation in key political discussions to accelerate development. They also mentioned the importance of integrating collaboration with meteorological institutes due to the growing significance of the impacts of climate change and the expected impact of the "El Niño" phenomenon this year.

Peru highlighted the need to accelerate progress on the sound management of chemicals with the assistance of the corresponding Forum Network.

Brazil proposed promoting greater Amazonian cooperation, including in discussions on meteorological issues, where their country has extensive experience.

Argentina mentioned the need to develop collaboration on desertification and drought, a reality that already affects a large part of their country. They pointed out that most of the international attention and funding on the issue has been directed towards Africa, while Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) are overlooked and should be supported by countries responsible for climate change.

The Secretariat stated that the gender issue is central in the strategies and action plans under the Forum, including the representation of the Gender and Environment Group in key regional discussions, where efforts are being made to enhance synergies and mainstream this topic.

Honduras supported Argentina's intervention on the issue of desertification, drought, and the need to draw attention to the effects of drought in Latin America, which not only affects African countries.

The Secretariat then presented the Common Framework for Sustainable Finance Taxonomies for Latin America and the Caribbean, which is the product of a Working Group of the Forum's Interagency Technical Committee.

The President emphasized the complexity of working with abstract concepts and the need for practical solutions to ensure the implementation of the common taxonomy framework.

The Secretariat stated that the development of climate-aligned taxonomies at the regional level is increasing, leading to the identification of the need for a framework to ensure that these different national systems are compatible with each other and internationally. It is a classification system for economic activities that can be considered 'green' in order to meet global climate change objectives.

Honduras asked how taxonomies engage developed countries in addressing their responsibility and how it can assist countries in the region with their commitments.

The Secretariat responded that taxonomies aligned with this framework limit the risk for investors, preventing their investments from being later designated as contrary to national and global environmental objectives. The taxonomy could be used to signal the market and create new domestic markets that are responsive to the country's needs

Colombia agreed that taxonomy can indicate environmental objectives in the context of the financial world, which may not always understand environmental matters, and promote relevant investments and activities (such as water, transportation, emissions reduction). It also helps define the types of investments desired in the country.

The President concluded the session by thanking all participants for their contributions. He requested the Secretariat to summarize them in the meeting report, so that all countries in the region are informed about the progress and can guide the Working Groups and Networks.

## Item 5.1 of the Agenda: Key outcomes of COP 27 of the UNFCCC and next steps.

The President welcomed Ms. Cecilia Kinuthia-Njenga, Director of the Intergovernmental Support and Collective Progress Division of the Secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), who provided a summary of the key outcomes of COP 27 and the next steps towards COP 28.

The presentation was only shared in PDF format, as requested by the UNFCCC Secretariat, so it couldn't be projected, but it was sent to be shared with the Ministers.

## Agenda Item 5.2: Update by the Incoming Presidency of COP 28 of UNFCCC

Next, the President gave the floor to Ambassador Majid Al Suwaidi, Special Representative of the Presidency of COP 28, who shared with the participants the vision of the COP 28 Presidency regarding the priorities for this summit. Additionally, he invited countries in the region to share their ideas on a potential climate change decision at the upcoming Forum meeting.

Belize referred to losses and damages, pointing out that the committee for COP 28 (established during COP 27) only includes 14 members from LAC and asked when there will be an opportunity for greater participation by representatives from countries in the region.

The UNFCCC Secretariat responded that the meetings this far have focused on procedural rules and modalities to ensure participation, and the committee is still under development in this regard. Subsequent meetings in June should provide opportunities for broader participation.

Ambassador Al Majid further stated that there is a need to expedite this process, as discussions should not overly focus on modalities.

Honduras expressed high expectations for COP 28, supporting the point that procedural rules need to be discussed but should not interfere with substantive work. It emphasized that new funds for losses and damages should be directed toward extreme and slow-onset weather events.

Honduras also mentioned the relevance of Articles 6.2 and 6.4 of the Paris Agreement and the need to prepare the global balance. It also highlighted that payments for results are an essential element of the country's development, within the context of protecting natural resources.

Peru agreed that it is necessary to make progress as quickly as possible and achieve concrete results. Peru expects strong messages regarding the necessary changes, not leaving anyone behind, and strengthening youth participation. It emphasized that the political declaration should include immediate actions to address global emissions gaps.

Colombia mentioned four pillars of action that they believe the COP 28 should promote. First, the mitigation pathway: fulfilling the goals of the Paris Agreement because without emissions reductions, adaptation is not possible. Second, the adaptation objective with an

emphasis on nature-based solutions, where the global balance will be crucial for developing ecological and community resilience. Third, the Loss and Damage Fund. Fourth, the emissions reduction pathway, including environmental limits to limit the proliferation of fossil fuels.

Colombia also highlighted the need to work on multilateral cooperation programs, such as the example of the Amazon region. It considered that regional programs will have a significant impact.

It emphasized that the countries in LAC cannot incur more debt. Fiscal capacity is required to address the ongoing crisis as one of the regions most vulnerable to climate change, where climate migration is already being experienced.

Among the critical points in the region is the just energy transition, given that the cost of renewable energy is very high. Additionally, the region's economy cannot rely solely on the extraction of minerals and other natural resources.

Colombia made a proposal that was also supported by the President of the Forum: to create a joint agenda for COP 28 on biodiversity, vulnerability, and natural resource management that the world will want to exploit.

It also indicated the need to exchange debt for conservation.

Argentina agreed that there are high expectations for COP 28. It stated that it is necessary to set more limits on the emissions of developed countries, which have reached their current situation without considering the consequences on the environment and the impacts on developing countries. Argentina wants to propose a regional position for investment in the protection of the natural resources of the LAC region, as the world's lung, including debt-for-environment swaps. It also highlighted the existing expertise in universities and climate research centers in the LAC region to impact global dialogue.

The President reflected on the level of mitigation achieved to date and the scale of funds available to respond to the challenges of the green transition and extreme events, stating that they are not sufficient. He emphasized the need to create realistic fiscal proposals to achieve "net-zero 2050" and the importance of the global balance to be conducted at COP 28. He added that there are available adaptation funds that the region should access and that debt-for-environment swaps should be pursued.

Ambassador Al Majid stated that key discussions are planned before COP 28 with the aim of working on all these ideas. The goal is to maximize the impact of COP 28 by advancing as much as possible instead of leaving all the work for the event.

He invited the Ministers to encourage the participation of Finance Ministers, making financial proposals and familiarizing them with the language of climate change. He mentioned that there will be a meeting of Finance Ministers in Morocco and that they will participate in the Presidential Meeting in Brasilia on May 30.

The President thanked everyone for their active participation in this session, as well as Ambassador Al Majid for his time.

## Item 5.3 of the Agenda: Main outcomes of COP 15 of the CBD and next steps

The President emphasized that biodiversity is a matter of great relevance for the region and has received increased attention since the adoption of the Global Biodiversity Framework at COP 15 in December 2022.

Next, a video by the Acting Executive Secretary of the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) was presented, summarizing the main outcomes of COP 15 and inviting countries to mainstream biodiversity goals across all levels of government, society, and financing.

The President recalled that the Forum had made a decision on biodiversity in its previous meeting, and this would be an opportunity to give renewed impetus to the biodiversity restoration plan that included that decision.

Barbados referred again to the issue of losses and damages, which is also related to biodiversity loss and the mentioned droughts. It emphasized the importance of recognizing that strategies for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) must be different from those of larger countries, particularly in the context of protecting native biodiversity and flora and fauna.

Argentina stated that it is very close to achieving the 30x30 target due to the efforts already made in protecting natural resources, such as national parks. It emphasized that this work has been done for the benefit of the entire world, not just Argentina.

Colombia expressed interest in developing a shared vision among Latin American countries for the upcoming COP meetings, agreeing on strategic matters as a region, even if it may not be possible for all issues. It highlighted the common history and experiences of LAC countries and expressed the conviction that the region can build a strategic vision to increase its impact at COP 28 and globally.

He highlighted the potential of renewable energy in Latin America and mentioned that Colombia has conducted a mapping of the possibilities of transitioning from mineral and fuel exports to renewable production, considering the impacts on biodiversity from the renewable industry.

The President mentioned climate-induced migrations as involuntary and as a sign of adaptation failure, a matter that must be considered a priority in the region, as it is already occurring. He agreed on the importance of early warning systems to help reduce emergencies and their consequences, as well as the need for a just energy transition.

Brazil shared that a presidential meeting has been convened on May 30th in Brasilia for the South American region, from which proposals can emerge to benefit the entire LAC region, focusing on different priorities such as climate change and the environment, infrastructure, security, and others.

The Secretariat highlighted the value of these discussions as they help identify important points for regional collaboration. The Secretariat will consider all these points for the Forum

Meeting in October. Participants were reminded that regarding minerals and metals, UNEA 5 adopted a resolution on the matter, and a regional consultation will take place on May 17-18 in Santiago, Chile.

He also added that the working group has not made much progress on the topic of biodiversity, but the goal is for the regional biodiversity cooperation program to advance with the guidance of the Bureau now that the Global Biodiversity Framework exists.

The President agreed to create a list of topics and review it in August.

Argentina emphasized the need to share the results of these discussions with countries that have not participated and to follow the example of Africa in establishing common positions.

The President concluded this session by thanking all participants for their contributions and requesting the Secretariat to reflect them in the meeting report and take them into account in the preparations for the 23rd Forum Meeting.

### Item 5.4 on the Agenda: Status of the INC on Plastic Pollution

Vice-Minister Giuliana Becerra from Peru shared information on the country's work in plastic management and the next steps in the process of the intergovernmental negotiating committee to develop a legally binding international instrument on plastic pollution, particularly in the marine environment, noting that Peru currently holds the Presidency of the Bureau.

Barbados expressed gratitude to Peru for its efforts in combating excessive plastic use and pollution. They emphasized that when banning single-use plastic products, it is essential to consider alternatives. They noted that unless strictly compostable materials are used, simply getting rid of plastics has limited impact. They mentioned that biodegradable materials, often used as substitutes, are also pollutants as they can take years to decompose and often enter and contaminate natural spaces in the same way as plastics. Ensuring the existence of minimum quality standards should be a key part of this conversation.

Peru agreed with Barbados, stating that the discussion on alternative materials is underway, and they are exploring various options.

Belize emphasized the need to consider small states specifically due to their often limited capacity, even with existing legislation. They added that due to their size, the industry is limited, and the pace of change is slower or more dependent on external influence.

Argentina highlighted the importance of a social approach in the context of transitioning to alternative materials, considering the large number of individuals who depend on the current solid waste management scheme.

The President expressed gratitude to all participants, particularly Peru, for sharing their experiences.

## Item 5.5 of the Agenda: Proposal for the creation of a Regional Ocean Commission

The Forum's President recalled the proposal from the Presidency for the creation of a regional ocean commission. They noted their awareness of the existence of the Cartagena Convention, the Antigua Convention, and the Lima Convention. Therefore, the objective is not to duplicate these efforts but to help strengthen them and fill gaps in areas where such instruments do not yet exist.

The Presidency subsequently provided further information on potential priority areas of work for the Commission (unregulated and unreported fishing; coastal communities and populations; marine waste management; deep-sea mining; and promoting the establishment of mixed-use marine areas).

They then invited members of the Bureau to share their opinions on this proposal.

Argentina indicated the need to avoid duplicating efforts in the context of oceans, as there are already other initiatives.

Colombia considered it appropriate to create a working group for the protection of the oceans, if not a commission.

Brazil requested more details on the possible functioning of the commission, to which the President added that the plan is to identify the necessary areas and instruments with a focus on ocean protection in collaboration with all countries, creating a space for the region to enhance ocean protection.

Brazil and Argentina emphasized the need to avoid duplicating efforts, to develop the proposal more clearly, and the possibility of establishing a dedicated group for dialogue on this topic before agreeing to the formation of a commission.

Colombia showed interest in the proposal as a mechanism for dialogue and stressed the importance of creating a common regional vision.

Honduras agreed that there should be an informal discussion.

UNEP's Secretariat suggested that these proposals could be discussed within the group of Senior Officials, where all countries could contribute to the conversation.

Thanking all the interventions, the Presidency confirmed that the agreement of the Bureau is not to recommend the creation of a commission at this time but to establish a working group with interested countries to explore how to enhance collaboration and exchange of experiences in the protection of the oceans.

## Item 6 of the Agenda: Other matters

Next, the President offered the floor for members of the Bureau to raise other issues.

Belize referred to water security and water management to ensure resilience to climate change for sustaining human life and ecosystems. They mentioned that the region has

faced the worst drought and, consequently, extreme migration in the past 10 years. They expressed concern about the ongoing expansion of the dry corridor in the region. Finally, they proposed that the Bureau includes this topic as an agenda item during the Forum in October.

Colombia agreed with the proposal and added that actions and policies in this context should be identified and shared. They proposed starting working with the Minister of Belize to implement the proposal for this topic on the Forum's agenda. They noted a strong connection between this point and collaboration with meteorological services.

The President stated that they will review all the points discussed with the aim of promoting and sharing them in preparation for COP 28, to achieve a positive outcome for the region at that summit.

## Item 7 of the Agenda: Meeting adjournment

After thanking all the participants, special guests, and organizers for their commitment, support, and participation, the meeting was adjourned by Mr. Franz Tattenbach at 4:45 pm, inviting the participants to a dinner hosted by the Government of the Republic of Costa Rica.

RESERE

# Annex I List of participants

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