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Ministerial Panel
The Role of Nature and Ecosystems Restoration
in Building a Sustainable Recovery

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I. Context of the session

1. “Making peace with nature is the defining task of the 21st Century. It must be the top, top priority for everyone, everywhere” was the message conveyed by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres during his landmark speech about the state of the planet at Columbia University in New York, on 20 December 2020. A triple planetary crisis—biodiversity loss, climate change, and pollution—is putting us at risk of irreversibly changing our relationship with the natural world and how we benefit from it. Biodiversity, in particular, is decreasing globally at alarming levels. The rate of species extinctions is accelerating. Around one million animal and plant species (out of an estimated eight million in total) are now threatened with extinction ([IPBES, 2019](#)). Nearly 21,000 monitored populations of mammals, fish, birds, reptiles and amphibians, encompassing almost 4,400 species around the world, have declined an average of 68 percent between 1970 and 2016 ([WWF Living Planet Report, 2020](#)).

2. This global crisis is a reminder of how the relationship between biodiversity and humans is interlinked, as noted in the ten recommendations from the report “Preventing the next pandemic: Zoonotic diseases and breaking the chain of transmission” ([UNEP, 2020](#)). Zoonotic diseases are emerging faster, driven by nature degradation. Sixty per cent of all known infectious diseases, and 75 per cent of all emerging infectious diseases are zoonotic, meaning that they originate in animals ([UNEP, 2020](#)). The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the importance of rebuilding our relationship with nature to avoid future pandemics.

3. The Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and its Aichi Targets expired in 2020 with none of the targets fully achieved, as stated in the Fifth Global Biodiversity Outlook ([SCBD, 2020](#)). This result reiterates an unprecedented intensification of the direct drivers of biodiversity decline (changes in land and sea use, climate change, pollution, direct exploitation of organisms, and invasive alien species).

4. According to the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), the Americas hold 40 percent of the world ecosystems’ capacity to produce nature-based materials consumed by people, an equivalent to three times more resources provided by nature per capita than are available to an average global citizen ([IPBES, 2018](#)).

5. Countries in the region have made important advances and investments in expanding their network of protected areas, designing and enforcing biodiversity-related legislation, and mainstreaming biodiversity in land-use and sectoral planning, amongst many other significant actions. As an example, the proportion of land and marine areas with valuable ecological resources now claimed to be protected from destructive use is 23.3% in Latin America and the Caribbean, in comparison to 14.8% worldwide ([IPBES, 2018](#)). Protecting these policy achievements can be one way to ensure the natural foundation is an integral part of the sustainable recovery of the region.

6. The United Nations Decade for Ecosystems Restoration has been adopted by the countries in the region, presenting an opportunity for to expand existing actions in restoring natural land and coastal-marine spaces which support biodiversity and provide important ecosystem services. A recent study found 154 restoration projects in Latin America and the Caribbean, contributing to the restoration of degraded lands and towards achieving the Bonn Challenge goals ([Romijn et al., 2019](#)). Such existing projects can provide insights for scaling up of ecosystem restoration as part of the sustainable recovery in the region.

7. Actions for a sustainable recovery should take full advantage of the synergies among the biodiversity, climate change, land degradation desertification, and disaster risk reduction and

mitigation agendas, in particular in the context of the Regional Cooperation Program on Biodiversity which promotes coordination and information exchange between countries in the region.

8. On 18 December, the High-Level Officers of the Forum of Ministers of Latin America and the Caribbean, after several rounds of revision and negotiation, approved the decision “Preventing future pandemics and accelerating sustainable recovery in Latin America and the Caribbean through the adoption of regional strategies for the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystems”. This decision includes the adoption of the “Regional Action Plan for the Decade on Ecosystem Restoration”, a regional-level voluntary effort that focuses on cooperation mechanisms and enabling conditions to promote, improve, accelerate and scale up ecosystem restoration in the region over the next 10 years.

9. The objective of this panel is twofold: First, to promote a Ministerial level dialogue about how the protection, conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of biodiversity can be a core element of sustainable socioeconomic recovery for countries in the region, and second, to launch the Action Plan for the Decade on Ecosystem Restoration in Latin America and the Caribbean. It is expected that this panel will contribute to the discussions on the post 2020 global biodiversity framework.

II. Guiding questions for the session.

- a. How can the conservation, sustainable use and benefit-sharing of biodiversity and the restoration of ecosystems be integrated into the sustainable recovery of the region, including job creation?
- b. What leadership commitments and actions could governments, organizations, Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, businesses, and citizens take to tackle the biodiversity crisis alongside their response to recover from the COVID-19 crisis?
- c. What existing activities, projects, initiatives can serve as good examples to achieve this biodiversity-positive, sustainable recovery? Can they be replicated throughout the region? How?
- d. What is needed for countries to ensure that biodiversity and nature are fully integrated into economic stimulus recovery packages?
- e. As the decade for the SDGs continues, the post-2020 global biodiversity framework develops and new biodiversity targets take shape, how can a biodiversity- and nature-centered recovery help accelerate the achievement of these existing and future goals?
- f. From the benefits of tourism and hunting, to the protection of rare and endangered species, economics can play an important role in understanding humans’ relationship with wildlife. Wildlife can provide economic benefits to individuals, communities, organizations, governments and business at, local, national, regional and global levels, and form the main building blocks of a sound economic development strategy in many cases. The wildlife economy as a regional strategy for sustainable development seems to be well under way in Africa. What role can a wildlife economy play in the sustainable recovery of Latin America and the Caribbean?
- g. How can Latin American and Caribbean governments, organizations, Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, businesses, and citizens help advance an

international agreement on biodiversity and demonstrate global leadership as they did for the climate change action?

- h. Given that recovery plans generally target more urgent actions (often reactions) in the short- or medium-term, in comparison to more long-term international commitments such as the SDGs decade and the post 2020 global biodiversity framework, how can the Latin American and the Caribbean community ensure they are integrated despite the differences in their timeframes and priority actions?

III. Reference documents

- a. Decision of the XXII Meeting of the Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean: Preventing future pandemics and accelerating unsustainable recovery in Latin America and the Caribbean through the adoption of regional strategies for the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystems
- b. Action Plan for the Decade on Ecosystem Restoration in Latin America and the Caribbean