



**Forum of Ministers of Environment
of Latin America and the Caribbean**

Report
**Meeting of the Bureau of the Forum of Ministers of
Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean**

Introduction

The last Meeting of the Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean, (XXI Forum) was held in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on 9-12 October 2018.

The Bureau of the XXII Forum was elected on 12 October 2018, as follows: Barbados (President), Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Honduras, Grenada, Guatemala, and Peru (Rapporteur).

Following up on the 2018 Meeting of the Forum, an Intersessional Meeting of the Forum was held on 5-6 November 2019, in Bridgetown, Barbados, chaired by the Hon. Trevor Prescod, Minister of Environment and Natural Beautification of Barbados and President of the XXII Meeting of the Forum.

The intersessional meeting concluded with a group of conclusions and recommendations, and the endorsement of three regional initiatives: (a) Ecosystems Restoration, in the framework of the UN Decade of Restoration, (b) Environmental Data Framework, (c) Environmental Emergency Preparedness, as well as the SIDS Programme for Sustainable Development.

The convening of the First Virtual Meeting of the Bureau of the XXII Meeting of the Forum follows the Letter of the President of the Forum sent on 25th April.

The meeting was held via the virtual platform Zoom, and was attended by all of the Members of the Bureau of the Forum of Ministers as follows: Hon. Trevor Prescod, Minister of Environment and National Beautification of Barbados, as President, Hon. Juan Cabandié, Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development of Argentina; Hon. Carolina Schmidt, Minister of Environment of Chile, Hon. Simon Stiell, Minister of Climate Resilience, the Environment, Forestry, Fisheries, Disaster Management and Information of Grenada; Hon. Elvis Rodas, Secretary of State of Natural Resources, Environment and Mines of Honduras, Hon. Fabiola Muñoz Dodero, Minister of Environment of Peru, as Rapporteur; Hon. Alfredo Alvarez, Vice Minister of Environment and Water of Bolivia; and Hon. Fredy Chiroy Vice Minister of Natural Resources and Climate Change of Guatemala.

Agenda item 1. Welcoming remarks.

The meeting began at 10:00AM **ET** with welcoming words from Mr. Leo Heileman, Regional Director and Representative of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), as Secretariat of the Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean.

The meeting continued with Agenda item 1 with welcoming remarks by the President of the Forum, Hon. Trevor Prescod, who expressed his appreciation to the Bureau members for their participation, particularly taking into account the tragic circumstances that the entire world has been facing in the recent months and their devastating impacts in our region.

He highlighted that six months has passed since the Intersessional meeting of the Forum, that brought delegations of 29 countries of the region to Barbados, to follow up on the decisions adopted in 2018 and consolidate a number of concrete conclusions and recommendations towards the next regional forum. As a follow up of the intersessional

meeting, the Secretary with the leadership of the Presidency, has developed a workplan towards the XXII Meeting of the Forum and start planning the convening of the forum.

He underlined the objective of the meeting which is to decide on the next steps for the planning of the Forum in light of COVID-19, which is an opportunity to review the outcomes of the Intersessional Meeting in view of the region's circumstances created by the Pandemic.

Agenda item 2. Environmental aspects and perspectives for the region In the Context of COVID -19

To facilitate the discussions under this agenda item, a background note document was prepared and circulated to the members of the Bureau.

The document was introduced by the Regional Environmental Governance Expert of the Presidency, Dr. Mark Griffith He emphasised a number of issues which provided the context for the dialogue. These included *inter alia*:

- The need for a better understanding of [Zoonotic Diseases](#) recognizing the interaction between people, animals, plants and their shared Environment and the provision of assistance, particularly to developing countries to strengthening their capabilities to respond to these diseases. This, he suggested, could be considered within the broader context of the connection between wildlife and human interaction as well as an increasing emphasis on Nature-based solutions.
- The need for the formulation of “new protocols” to support the tourism in the region, particularly in Caribbean Small Island developing States. In this regard, it was highlighted that it is of fundamental importance that current tourism programmes be re-evaluated so as to respond to the requirements brought into consideration by the “New Normal,” in the post COVID era.
- The need for the region to place more emphasis on preserving food security, which in turn have implications for the way land and land resources are used in many of the LAC countries. In this regard, land-based solutions and strengthening the resilience of food and water systems, we can play an important in reducing the crisis' impact on global poverty and food insecurity.
- The pandemic also underscored the need for enhancing cooperation between the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. This was most aptly demonstrated for example by the sourcing of medical personnel to assist in individual countries and regional responses to pandemic and expand the collaboration on environmental science and research. Such regional cooperation mechanisms need to be strengthened and extended to other areas such as utilizing the wealth.
- It was also emphasised that the current pandemic has given an insight into the possible behaviour of future pandemics, which are likely to occur. Given that climate change together with other natural and man-made stressors influence human health and disease, countries must be cognisance of the public health implications of climate change and plan appropriately and pro-actively.

After his presentation, the floor was open for comments and inputs from the members of the Bureau.

The Minister of Environment of Chile, Ms. Carolina Schmidt, took the floor and reflected on the current crisis the countries of the region are facing. She highlighted that governments should link recovery plans with environmental and climate solutions in areas such as energy, transport, ecosystems, and cities resilience, as well as waste management, circular economy and biodiversity conservation and nature-based solutions. To achieve this momentum, she highlighted the need of implementing a coordinated and coherent set of fiscal instruments and measures to generate, a “good business environment”, as well as “green investments”. She also recalled that Chile, as COP 25 Presidency, made a special effort in promoting regional initiatives to combat climate change, that can be used to boost a green recovery from COVID, and that may also be followed up by this Forum of Ministers, among them: launching of “Renewable Energy for Latin America and the Caribbean (RELAC) target”, a commitment to achieve an average of 70% installed capacity in the renewable energy matrix by 2030 in the region; the Declaration for the Decade of Restoration of Ecosystems for Latin America and the Caribbean: which commits to the restoration of 20 million hectares between 2020 and 2030; the “Santiago Action Plan” of the Coalition of Ministers of Finance co-led by Chile and Finland, to foster green economic instrument for the recovery; the Santiago call for action on forests”, that could generate many green jobs; the Platform for Climate Action in Agriculture for Latin America and the Caribbean (PLACA), which promoted low emission and climate resilient agriculture actions, and the “Gender Action Plan” and the “Lima Work Program which were renewed. She ended underlining the importance of multilateralism as key in the fight against the current global crisis and we have the opportunity of joining efforts using the Forum of Ministers as a platform.

Mr. Simon Stiell, Minister of Grenada, took the floor and expressed the particular vulnerabilities of the Caribbean subregion exposed by the pandemic, including the high level of foreign debt, the ineligibility for financing and the extreme dependence on tourism, exacerbated by the upcoming hurricane season that begins in June and that it is said to be the worst season of extreme weather events. He agreed with the Minister of Chile on the extraordinary opportunity presented by the current pandemic to work together and figure out how to articulate efforts to address all of these challenges in a significant way. He expressed that great leadership at national and regional level as well as political will are key to address.

The Secretary of State of Honduras, Mr. Elvis Rodas, underlined that climate change and the economy in decline was an already underlying existing problem in the country and in the region, which will be further affected by pandemic. Mr. Rodas highlighted that the Central American Integration System as a subregion came together to address this issue by way of a declaration, and he invited the countries of the region to come together and do the same as a region to help the economy to improve through the services provided by natural resources and ecosystems. He mentioned that the Green Climate Fund is willing to redirect funds for the generation of jobs and build food and water security to reactivate our economies.

The Vice Minister of Guatemala, Mr. Fredy Chiroy, took the floor and spoke about the difficulties the country is facing due to COVID-19, and some of the actions taken to help in reducing the amount of cases in the country where 60% of the population lives in poverty, and access to running water was limited. He emphasised the need for investments to be made, particularly in water and sanitation. In this regard, he called for the formulation and implementation of an Innovation and Development plan as well as an Economy Reactivation Plan. He highlighted the importance of coming together as a region and route public

investment towards the creation of jobs based on infrastructure and green building while emphasising the relationship between water security and public health.

The Minister of the Environment of Peru, Mrs. Fabiola Muñoz, shared the opinions expressed by Chile and Granada, about this being an extraordinary opportunity that the region should take advantage of to act in unity and with a sense of urgency for climate action. She expressed that the pandemic has impacted all the countries, in Peru, specifically in the city of Lima as a consequence of the measures of social immobility, it has had as a positive result: the improvement of the air quality levels, the increase of dolphins on the coasts of the city and the significant increase in migratory birds, which has generated greater awareness and environmental awareness among citizens. She also stressed that it is imperative to articulate ways of influencing economic recovery with a focus on climate change and reducing emissions, positioning the ministries of the environment in discussions for the development of recovery plans in our countries. To this end, she underlined the importance of promoting the exchange of experiences in the region on issues such as circular economy, water and rural sanitation, low emission economy, among others. On the other hand, she pointed out that the current context is an opportunity to generate an incidence of change in the behaviour of the productive sectors and of society as a whole, as there are issues such as water management, efficient and integrated management of waste, the issue of seas, the circular economy, which are extremely important agenda items and it is necessary to have leadership such as the Ministers of the Environment to promote more than ever those changes in our countries.

Mr. Juan Cabandié, Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development of Argentina, said that green jobs are a way to improve economies in the region, and financing for the sustainability of real economy is important to solve the historic deb of our countries which should include environmental governance with harmony between productivity and the environment. He added that regrettably the COVID-19 will have a direct effect in the increase of poverty of our region and this social dimension of the crisis should be addressed as a priority.

Secretary Rodas, from Honduras took the floor again to propose and request UNEP to undertake an economic assessment after the pandemic to support green recovery in the countries of the region.

After the participation of the Bureau members, Mr. Leo Heileman, informed that in the current situation, when the immediate priority is to protect people and despite restrictions in many countries, UNEP remains open for business and working with countries and partners as the pandemic requires a sound environmental response now and in the post-crisis setting as governments approve stimulus packages to support job creation, poverty reduction, development, and economic growth.

In this regard, the region has always defended the interdependence of people and planet and, at this time an united regional voice is an important building block to inform the key international negotiations around nature and biodiversity, climate change, and the chemicals agenda.

He also informed that the portfolio is being reviewed to support the response and the regional office has prepared and distributed to the Ministers of Environment and the UN Resident Coordinators in the region, four Policy Briefs aimed at providing information on the benefits of integrating environmental aspects in the emergency.

UNEP is contributing to COVID-19 UN response plans and the UN socio economic impact analysis of COVID in the region and a specific action plan on COVID-19 is developed for the regional Issue Based Coalition on Climate Change and Resilience.

A summary of the agenda item was presented by Mrs. Nicole Scholar-Tasker, Environmental Officer for Legal and Governance matters of Barbados, on behalf of the Presidency. Mrs Scholar-Tasker underscored the main elements of the Bureau members remarks, as well as their common and complementary views, as resumed above.

Action point: The Secretariat, in consultation with interested countries will summarize the main elements of the dialogue, in the format of a concise political message and circulate it to the Bureau members for review and approval. Furthermore, the document will contain a number of practical and implementable recommendations which would form the basis for specific action by the countries in articulating and addressing the environmental implications of COVID-19 Argentina, and Grenada offered their support in this endeavour.

With the approval of the Bureau, the document will be circulated to all Ministers of the region for consideration of adoption by the Forum.

Agenda item 3. Preparations for the XXII Meeting of the Forum

The Secretariat, represented by Mr. Heileman, gave a brief overview of the work done so far in the preparations for the XXII Meeting of the Forum. He mentioned that the Secretariat with the leadership of the Presidency, has prepared a workplan and a route map towards the XXII Meeting of the Forum, which is included as Annex III of the annotated agenda, with the activities that have been carried out and programmed to be implemented.

He highlighted that the advent of COVID-19 has put a hold on some of the activities that had been planned and the modalities and focus of preparatory activities have been readjusted. In this regard one important matter for consideration is the modality of the upcoming ministerial meeting, which in light of the current situation, envisaged restrictions of movements and need to ensure the safety of people as we adapt to the new normal, is advisable to take place in a virtual format. The Minister of Grenada endorsed the approach suggested by the Regional Director. No suggested decision was taken on this issue.

Action point:

Continue implementation of the workplan, with the convening of technical preparatory meetings in the coming months following the virtual format.

Agenda item 4. Other matters

Under this agenda item two issues were presented to the meeting. First an update on the preparations for World Environment Day (WED); and secondly, the proposal from the Government of Colombia.

UNEP's Regional Director informed that the WED 2020, to be hosted by Colombia, will be held virtually, underlining that this will be the first time that this event will be held in this manner. A series of events will be taking place during the one-day programme, including interviews, launches, panels with different personalities and media activities where it is expected for the public to engage.

On the second topic, a note on the progress for the establishment of the Regional Coalition on Circular Economy was presented. An official letter was sent by UNEP's Regional Director to all Ministers, inviting them to participate in the Regional Coalition on Circular Economy, and requesting the nomination of the national focal points, as well an invitation for expression of interest to be a member of the Steering Committee of the Regional Coalition. The deadline for the expression of interest was the 30th May 2020. The Secretary informed that Colombia is the only country that responded to the invitation within the deadline, and Colombia has expressed the interest to chair the Coalition and has submitted all relevant information responding to the selection criteria. Furthermore, Colombia is offering the opportunity to announce the Regional Coalition on Circular Economy, at the highest level, during the World Environment Day, which could showcase the leadership of the region worldwide. Considering the proximity of this celebration, this matter is raised to the attention of the Bureau.

Action points:

To request UNEP's Regional Director, to issue communication to Colombia welcoming the initiative to announce the Regional Coalition on Circular Economy at the World Environment Day, and their expressed commitment to serve as Chair of the Steering Committee of the Regional Coalition.

Request UNEP to continue the work with member states to complete the setting of the Steering Committee of the Regional Coalition.

Before the end of the meeting, Ms. Muñoz, Minister of Peru, suggested addressing issues related to: seas, oceans (blue economy), the strengthening of the intraregional agenda and trade exchange of products from agrobiodiversity and forests with added value within the region, at the next meeting of Forum Ministers, which will help reduce deforestation and improve the conservation of biodiversity.

Agenda item 5. Closing of the meeting.

With no other business to be discussed, Hon. Trevor Prescod thanked all the members of the Bureau for the active and fruitful discussions held in this virtual gathering and closed the meeting at 12:15 ET.

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Annex I
List of Participants

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