
SESSION IV UNEA Preparations

Statement of the Regional Facilitator of Major Groups and Stakeholders for Latin America and the Caribbean, Ms. Lorena Terrazas

If where there is a need a right is born let us remember that in our region the needs have never been bigger: poverty and social exclusion, biodiversity loss, increase of emissions, ecocide and socio environmental conflicts, indiscriminate use of pesticides, thousands of sources of fires, tons of waste flowing into the sea, privatization of public spaces, exploitation of protected natural areas and the territories of Indigenous People, increasing vulnerability to extreme weather events, appropriation of nature and extractive industries, institutional weakness and corruption. Where are the guarantees of the right to a healthy environment? These needs, dear delegates, are severely neglected and we do not see even a slight change from the patterns that brought us here.

We could list the countless ways in which investments in nature contribute to the eradication of poverty, job creation, economic prosperity, human and ecosystem health, sustainable food systems, the fight against climate change and good environmental governance, but you already know them. The reports of the IPCC, GEO, IPBES, *Laudato si'*, the speech of the Secretary General of the United Nations at Columbia University: "The State of the Planet" and the drafts of the decisions of UNEA-5 are clear in this regard. There is no lack of knowledge, but there is a lack of commitments and actions.

In political spaces, commitments should not arise from private will, which comes and goes, but from collective responsibility, which is assumed with policies and sustained with facts. We know these responsibilities are differentiated, which is why we accompany them side by side in demanding that the most powerful nations bear the main costs of environmental protection. But they are also common. Where are the common but differentiated responsibilities of our governments with their people, of corporations with consumers and workers, of adults with children and the youth, reflected in facts? The weakest are always the main losers, and you, Ministers of the Environment, are among the powerful.

We do not come to ask that you make great commitments to environmental justice and the protection of Life on Earth, but we do ask that those who assume these commitments, fulfill them. The implementation gap between the decisions adopted by the Forum of Ministers of the Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean and the United Nations Environment Assembly is dreadful. However, they come together year after year to evaluate what has been done and conclude that it is very little, to analyze the challenges and recognize that there are many, and re-commit to adopting measures that end up being a dead letter the moment the lights in the meeting room are turned off and each delegate returns home. Over time, it is worth wondering if they are not supporting a structure that has lost meaning and we, as the Civil Society, must ask ourselves if we stopped being witnesses and have become accomplices.

We speak of the principle of non-regression as if it were not systematically violated in the facts every time we change the subject and transfer funds from one priority to another, because funds do not grow to the extent that problems do and without funding there are no solutions. UNEA-5 will focus on "Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals", but how are we doing with the Innovative Solutions of UNEA-4? What happened to UNEA-3's Pollution-Free Planet? How was the science-policy interface of UNEA-2 strengthened? And we could go on for hours exposing the huge gap between what is said and the facts.

The XVI Meeting of the Forum of Ministers of the Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean, which took place in Santo Domingo in 2008, approved Decision 13 on "Strengthening the participation of the Major Groups of Agenda 21". It was agreed there to "*Promote the strengthening of the UNEP Regional Forums for Civil Society, encouraging the availability of resources for their implementation, as well as broadening and diversifying the base of representatives of the nine major groups (...)*" and "*Supporting the implementation of national and sub-regional consultation processes prior to the Regional Forums, favoring the participation of representatives of all the major groups*". From then until now, the Regional Consultation Meetings have been shorter, smaller, and less representative. Today we could ask for the same, but we request that the support for participation be at least like what we had 12 years ago. Paradoxically, going backward would be a significant improvement compared to what we have today. That is how much we have regressed.

In many countries in the region, we have a broad regulatory framework on environmental matters, however, these laws become a repealed role as there are no institutions to guarantee their effectiveness and application. That is why we call on the importance of the Environmental Rule of Law. It requires not only rules, but also institutions that apply those rules so that they are not a dead letter. It is necessary that the laws also adapt to new issues and that countries begin to respect governance and environmental justice, where ecocides and crimes against the community of Life do not go unpunished.

We are entering the United Nations' Decade for Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030. We will do, as we always do, everything we can so that this effort does not fall only on two Agencies and 194 countries, but that it may be a task embraced by the 9 major groups and the unorganized global community.

But we also ask ourselves, what was left of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014)? Where was the leading role that UNEP once had in environmental education and youth participation? What happened to the TUNZA Strategy adopted by the Governing Council in 2003 and reaffirmed in 2009? And the GEO Youth that was the pride of Latin America and the Caribbean? Ozzy Ozone? Youth XChange? The children's painting contests? The children and youth' conferences? Nothing remains, nothing but outdated publications, old photos, broken links, and memories of what we were once a part of. Decades pass and problems persist. We therefore ask that the United Nations Decade for the Restoration of Ecosystems 2021-2030 does not mean leaving debts unpaid. Without education there is no restoration.

This year has shown, like no other, the vulnerability of the human species. COVID-19 has been, without a doubt, the worst blow that most of us can remember. Agenda 21 warned that "The cost of inaction could exceed the financial cost of the implementation" and that inaction would limit the options of future generations (A21.33.4). Well, we are paying for it, in bills and in human lives. The options are

not the same as 28 years ago and that is why today we must think about the Green Recovery to COVID-19.

We will be alongside our governments helping each community to stand up and helping humanity to heal wounds, but are we today, even one step closer to preventing this from happening again? The answer is no, because this, which should have been an inescapable wake-up call about the consequences of our destructive relations with the planet, ended up limiting itself to containing damage without an analysis of the causes and a rethinking of our way of inhabiting the Earth.

We want to talk about Environmental Governance and cooperation. Let's talk about how UNEP will work together with the World Health Organization (WHO) so that not a single citizen is left unaware that COVID-19 could have been prevented and that preventing new pandemics comes hand in hand with environmental protection.

Or better yet, let's stop talking and push the action. If not now when?