

**Statement of Her Excellency the Honourable Mia Amor Mottley
MP QC, during the XXII Meeting of the Forum of Ministers of
Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean**

First let me address the Forum.

- Mr. President;
- Ministers of the Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean;
- Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of United Nations Environment Programme;
- Other United Nations Officials;
- Excellencies;
- Invited Guests;
- Members of the media;
- Ladies and Gentlemen.

First let me take this opportunity to welcome all of you to “Barbados”—virtually—the host for the 22nd Meeting of the Forum of Ministers of the Environment for Latin America and the Caribbean. [I, however, look forward to welcoming you to Barbados, in person, once the world overcomes the COVID-19 Pandemic].

I would like to thank the Ministers of the Environment for Latin America and the Caribbean for placing their trust in Barbados in hosting and organizing the 22nd Meeting of the Forum of Ministers of the Environment for Latin America and the Caribbean. Despite the challenges encountered, which were not anticipated, before the onslaught of COVID-19; we have nevertheless been able to convene this august

body, with substantive outputs which we hope will be endorsed in the next two days.

This is testimony to the commitment of a small team of persons in our Ministry of the Environment and National Beautification, working closely with a small group of persons in the United Nations Environment Programme Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Secretariat for the Forum.

As you are aware this is the second time that Barbados has hosted the Forum of Ministers of the Environment, and the only English-speaking country of Latin America and the Caribbean that has done so twice. This is testimony to the importance we attach to The Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean as the region's most representative and long-standing political gathering on environmental matters.

After almost forty years of its existence, having been established in 1982, it remains **the vital political space [Emphasis Added]**, let me repeat again, **the vital political space** for bringing the world's attention to the environmental challenges we face in our hemisphere, particularly as we reflect on our progress in pursuing our environmental goals, in the context of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development.

Take for instance, as we move to end hunger, the use of pesticides intensified 12% in Mesoamerica and the Caribbean region, and more than doubled in South America in last two decades. Related, is the fact that our region generates about 350 tonnes of food waste per day, entailing higher pressures for the local environment. And, added to that, our Region's recycling rates are amongst the lowest in the world.

UNEP's "**Measuring Progress: The Environmental Dimension of the Sustainable Development Goals**", also shows that the average number of climate change related extreme events has increased by 10% to 20% over the last 3 decades in Latin America, despite our efforts to reinforce to our climate resilience and decarbonize our economies, as we forge ahead with honouring the commitments in our National Determined Contributions to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

At this point on behalf of the people of Barbados, my Government and on my own behalf of my own self, I wish to convey our deepest regret to, and solidarity with, the countries of the region that were severely impacted by hurricanes during 2020, in particular, Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador and Colombia.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen

Based on our experiences of organizing this meeting during the worst pandemic in our lifetime; it is evident that fundamental reforms must take place in this Forum is to tackle the mentioned, and the myriad of environmental challenges we face head on. This is a *sine qua non*, if the Forum is to bring meaning to our people and if it is to remain relevant in a rapidly changing world.

Madam Executive Director, this is an issue for which urgent attention is needed. I am aware that recommendations have been made in this regard and I encourage this august body to continue its efforts in the intersessional period to strengthen the governance and effectiveness of the Forum. That effort should include the work of the Inter Agency Technical Committee as well of the ability of the Forum to translate the **Decisions** into **Tangible Action** on the behalf of the peoples of our hemisphere. This might require fundamental changes in the specific governance mechanism(s) of the Forum.

In addition to the reforms needed at the regional level with respect to the Forum; another area of concern which requires a second look, Madam Executive Director, is the **relationship between the Forum and the United Nations Environment Assembly; and how to get consideration of the environmental issues we face in our hemisphere more explicitly reflected in the work of the UNEA** and

by extension, the work of the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean.

Another area in which some improvement might be necessary is the relationship between the Forum of Ministers in its capacity as the pre-eminent policy forum on environmental issues in our hemisphere, and the Ministers of Environment of Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC). There is need in Barbados' view, for a closer relationship between these two bodies—**Our Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean** and **Our Ministers of Environment of the Community of Latin America and Caribbean States**.

Similarly, in Barbados' view there **is need for an elevated status of our Forum of Ministers of the Environment** in the **Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development**, which is charged with the responsibility of leading the region's review and follow-up for the implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

Finally, I wish to touch briefly on the issue of regional cooperation between the countries of our Hemisphere. I think there is need for us to redouble our efforts in the strengthening of cooperation, in particular between the English Speaking and Spanish Speaking parts of our Hemisphere.

In this regard, I honestly believe that the Forum of Ministers of the Environment must be used as a vehicle to drive such cooperation and collaboration. One of the lasting legacies which could result from Barbados' Presidency of the 22nd Meeting of this august body, is the development of a **Latin America and Caribbean Cooperation Initiative on Environmental Action.**

Already my Government through the Ministries of Environment and National Beautification and Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade have commenced communications with a number of countries of our region to build out bilateral programmes to this end.

But this is bilateral action, catalyzed by the existence of the Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean. The building blocks therefore exist to concretize a pragmatic and impactful regional cooperation programme amongst our countries. Need I remind you, that this in essence, was the very basis for establishing the Forum.

The reality is that there exists, active cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean in many other domains among our countries. We in Barbados, understand for instance, the importance and need for such cooperation on matters of health. In our quest to deal with our response to the COVID-19 crisis, Cuba was one of the countries from which we

were able to source much needed human and technical support. This form of cooperation must be scaled up more in our hemisphere.

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates.

Environment challenges travel across boundaries and brings nations together. As such the environment also provides the platform that can enable regional cooperation and action.

This remains our common endeavour as we recommit to support each other in this journey. Solidarity and compassion are essential today in the midst of this devastating crisis and will be essential to leave no one behind.

We must not underestimate the importance of the Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean for expressing the region's needs and urgencies, with a single voice at the international stage. Needed therefore, is a stronger, more impactful, and more strategic regional forum- one that can catalyze regional efforts to deliver more and better results for the citizens of our region.

I thank you.