

MOP AARHUS CONVENTION STATEMENT

Thank you for this opportunity to share our achievements to date in the regional process for environmental democracy and the full implementation of Principle 10 of the Río Declaration, in which ECLAC serves as the technical secretariat. We are proud of these developments but, above all, they encourage us to continue to move forward with our international and national commitments.

We strongly believe in a region that is the forefront of its development, not only with having prosperous and modern nations, but also societies that are just, tolerant, and committed with the environment. A helpful society, where the challenges of growth demand not only efficiency but also political and human accordance with inclusion and sustainability. In short, a society who has equality at the core.

Therefore, during the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Río+20) we proposed to initiate a regional dialogue on the implementation of Principle 10. This exercise was affirmed in a text signed, at that time, by 10 nations and had, from the outset, the strong support of ECLAC. In the Declaration, we acknowledged that commitments were needed to ensure proper fulfillment of the rights of access to information, participation and justice regarding environmental issues, and we started a process towards the formulation of an instrument to promote their full implementation in Latin America and the Caribbean.

So far, we have approved a road map, a plan of action, a vision for our regional instrument and lines of action for cooperation. Through these documents we established the Presiding Officers and two working groups: one on capacity building and cooperation, and another one on access rights and a regional instrument. In addition, we opted for a broad definition of the term "public", so as to achieve the maximum possible participation and inclusion. Accordingly, any natural or legal person or community organization can participate in the meetings and receive all information about the process by just registering in the Regional Public Mechanism. Also, we agreed a

participatory methodology to promote a fluid dialogue and close collaboration with stakeholders.

Let me take this opportunity to highlight the "vision" for our regional instrument. In this fundamental document, we stress the link between the right to a healthy environment, access rights and human rights. According to the signatory countries, the exercise of access rights contributes to improved environmental protection and, as a result, improved protection for human rights. We are moving not only towards an environmental instrument but a human rights instrument as well. Moreover, we recognized that access rights are interrelated and interdependent, and so each should be promoted and implemented in an integrated and balanced manner. Finally, the signatory countries agreed to seven basic principles: equality, inclusion, transparency, proactivity, collaboration, progressive realization and non-regression.

The process received international support from the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) and the CELAC-EU summit on 2013. It has also benefited from the contributions of various experts and organizations such as UNEP, UNITAR, of course the Aarhus Convention Secretariat and the United Nations Independent Expert on Human Rights and the Environment. It has also been on the agenda of numerous intergovernmental meetings such as the Governing Council of UNEP (Nairobi, February 2013), the Regional Conference on Access to Information in the Caribbean (Jamaica, March 2013), the Conference on Sustainable Development in Latin America and the Caribbean Forum (Bogotá, March 2013), the regional Forum of Ministers of Environment (Los Cabos, March 2014) and the last session of ECLAC (Lima, May 2014).

Nowadays we have significant input for our work from the documents prepared by ECLAC regarding the current situation, perspectives and practices in the region with respect to access rights and a typology of international instruments. As part of the capacity building working group, in 2013, two training Workshops were jointly organized in Trinidad and Tobago and in Peru by ECLAC, UNEP, UNITAR, the Access Initiative-World Resources Institute (WRI-TAI), and organizations from the host countries. Additionally, the working groups are meeting on a continuous basis through virtual meetings.

The initiative has grown and strengthened.

To date, we have the participation of 18 signatory countries allowing us to potentially benefit more than 500 million people. Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, Honduras, Trinidad and Tobago, Argentina, Guatemala and St. Vincent and the Grenadines joined the commitment initially made by Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Dominican Republic and Uruguay.

In our region we are facing environmental challenges and legitimate social demands that compel us to develop appropriate public policies. Many of the conflicts that have surfaced in our region have to do with insufficient social and institutional dialogue with regard to projects or investments having high social impact. One of the greatest challenges in our region is the sustainable management of its rich and economically-important natural resource base. As highlighted by UNEP, the Latin America and Caribbean region is home to 34 per cent of the world's plant species, 27 per cent of mammals, 31 per cent of the world's freshwater resources, 23 per cent of the world's forests and 57 per cent of the planet's primary forests. Sustainability requires not only balancing economic growth and environmental protection; it demands social equality, dialogue and inclusiveness in order to allow the public to retake the confidence in their government's decisions.

Signatory countries have given a clear political signal. As stated in our common vision, we believe that the adoption of a regional instrument will: facilitate actions and strategies to tackle common challenges; promote dialogue, cooperation, technical assistance and capacity building; strengthen the national application of access rights; and encourage the formulation of a regional agenda on access rights based on sustainability and equality.

The plan of action ends this year, and we still have important tasks ahead of us.

Guided by Principle 10, this dialogue can allow Latin America and the Caribbean to progress as a whole, to address environmental inequities and to

create a regional public good in the form of access rights as part of the post 2015 development agenda.

This year we will focus on the nature and contents of a regional instrument. Regardless of that decision, we must advance towards the full implementation of Principle 10 and avoid taking any regressive step, while recognizing the individual circumstances of each country. Also, the instrument must build on the agreements already reached in the region and aim to strengthen national laws and international agreements, in keeping with the purpose of the Declaration.

This is the first time Chile launches a process for an environmental instrument, and we do it under the firm conviction that greater inclusion, equity and regional integration are possible. As Chairs of this process, we hope to conclude an ambitious regional instrument. We must retain the momentum and the political commitment gained so far. Your contributions are therefore invaluable.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to address you all.