

Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean

10 minute introduction, following the Minister and Chair

Peace, Prosperity & Potential in Latin America and the Caribbean

[INTRODUCTION]

President Santos, Excellencies, Ministers, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to begin by thanking the Government of Colombia for hosting this meeting. The timing is perfect for two reasons.

1. **First**, because the peace negotiations are a reminder of the environment's integral role in so many aspects of our lives. Natural resources have been linked to **40%** of interstate conflicts in the last **60 years** and to the funding of **18** violent conflicts in the last **25 years**.

To break such trends, it is crucial to properly understand those relationships and the socio-economic implications of the resulting environmental exploitation and damage. That's why research, like the report commissioned by the Colombian Government, is so valuable.

This new work covers deforestation, CO2 emissions, oil spills and mercury pollution, revealing how **\$2.2 billion** a year in environmental benefits were lost through the conflict with FARC - which highlights, as President Santos put it, that: *"The armed conflict that has affected us all has been a conflict against our natural resources."*

Given that conflicts associated with natural resources are more likely to relapse into conflict within **5 years** of a peace agreement, having such detailed information available at this point is invaluable. Because, just as the environment can be a trigger, a victim and a resource through which to prolong conflict, it can – *and often is* – a powerful tool to help rebuild trust, health, communities, livelihoods, economies and hope.

That's exactly why the environment is an integral element of every one of the 17 goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

2. **Which is the second reason** why the timing of this event is perfect.

Because following last year's historic agreement on the **2030 Agenda** and the **Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction**, we are:

- Just a few weeks away from signing the **Paris Agreement on Climate Change**
- And less than two months away from the **United Nations Environment Assembly - UNEA-2** - which will help member states to enact those commitments: globally, regionally, nationally and locally.

[INTEGRATED APPROACH]

The scheduled update of the **Latin America and the Caribbean Initiative for Sustainable Development:**

- Underscores the need to foster fast, ambitious and *integrated* action.
- And reminds the world, that this region's experience must be widely shared, particularly for planning and economic policies.

There are already strong regional steps in that direction:

- Through the networks **this Forum** established on issues like air pollution, environmental education and sustainable consumption and production;
- Through the **Brazilian government's** contribution to **South-South Cooperation** to achieve and monitor progress;
- Through the regional chair of **UNEA2**, who will be critical in key decisions ranging from the illegal wildlife trade to chemicals, waste management and air quality;
- And through the critical Conferences of the Parties for both:
 - The **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora** (CITES)
 - And the **Convention on Biological Diversity**, which will round the year off in Mexico with a look at how this can become a standard consideration for production policies.

[POTENTIAL FOR PROGRESS]

However, there is still huge potential for progress.

For example, this region is home to more than half the world's biodiversity and some of its most sensitive hotspots. Such experience - particularly indigenous knowledge – is invaluable in managing the ecosystems that support activities as diverse as climate regulation, food security and, of course the eco-tourism that drives so much economic development in the region.

But it applies equally across a wide range of interrelated activities.

When it comes to tackling greenhouse emissions, Latin America and the Caribbean are responsible for less than **10%** of the global total, but the region is at the forefront of efforts to tackle them.

- All of Costa Rica's electricity came from renewable sources last year.
- And all of Brazil and Uruguay's new electricity generation tenders since 2013 have been won by solar and wind technologies.
- This shows the world that renewable energy is ready for a massive scale up – a point that was driven home by the latest report on ***Global Trends in Renewable Energy Investment***, which was launched last week.

And when it comes to deforestation, regional losses cover the equal to **70%** of Costa Rica every year. Yet Brazil and Costa Rica's **RE**-forestation show that the kind of strategies we see with REDD+ can preserve options for carbon sequestration, healthy livelihoods and sustainable development.

In fact, we need to learn, share and rapidly scale up experience from right across Latin America and the Caribbean.

Look at **fiscal mechanisms**, which support environmental management by sending market signals and changing behaviour.

- Next year Chile will implement a CO2 tax for electricity generation, which was adopted in 2014.
- This pioneering move for the region's economic policies on climate change mitigation and the environment is now also being taken up by countries like Mexico.

[LIFETYLE IMPLICATIONS]

The diversity of even these few examples reflects why we need:

- Profound change in every aspect of our lifestyles, economies and societies
- To replace traditional, but ultimately ineffective models of growth, with sustainable and reliable alternatives.

That's why UNEP will keep supporting countries implementing **10 Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production.**

Because getting this right will bring the benefits of new models of economic growth for both rural and urban communities.

In rural areas, where two thirds of the region's farmers are vulnerable to climate change, there is little access to the technology and financing necessary to strengthen resilience.

- But innovative **private sector micro-financing** in Colombia and Peru is protecting the production and livelihoods of over **4,000** small farms, by letting them switch to ecosystem based adaptation techniques.
- Across the region, this approach could benefit almost 12 million smallholdings; across the world, the potential is enormous.

In cities, which are home to **over 80%** of the region's population, there are already critical sustainability indicators, such as air pollution, congestion and loss of productivity.

- Here, innovations like **LED street lighting** and **rapid bus systems**, which started in this region,
- Can help make cities more liveable and competitive, saving thousands of tonnes of carbon dioxide and millions of dollars.
- This kind of experience will feed into the new UNEP programme to help cities adapt and mitigate climate change, which is already under way in Brasilia, Recife, San Salvador, Kingston and Xalapa.

Again, that's why UNEP is working with governments in Latin America and the Caribbean to expand initiatives like **eMobility** and **en.lighten** and share the lessons.

[CO-OPERATION & LEADERSHIP]

The **Regional Cooperation Platform** to be adopted here will strengthen that approach and increase action on climate adaptation and mitigation.

There are strong foundations to build on, after this has been one of the *most* successful regions at phasing out ozone depleting substances, with ozone officers in every ministry. However, I would call on you to repeat that leadership by supporting the **Montreal Protocol** in implementing the “Dubai Pathway” and reaching an ambitious agreement to tackle HFCs.

Thanks to efforts from this region, the Montreal Protocol provides an unprecedented example of the scale on which global change can be delivered through evidence based policies, which evolve with the science.

Now, we need to replicate – or even *surpass* - that success with the 2030 Agenda. But the challenges are as diverse and dynamic as the world we share.

Growing interaction between people and their environment will bring new issues such as an increase in health problems, like **Zika** or **Ebola**, which shape and then reshape our management of ecosystems, pollution and land degradation.

Latin America and the Caribbean recognised this many years ago, so your experience will be invaluable at the **UNEA-2 ministerial dialogue**, which will reinforce our efforts to support the region.

[CONCLUSION]

Ladies and gentlemen, sustainable development - driven by an inclusive green economy and a determination to tackle climate change - offers real hope for a healthy planet with healthy people.

The rich experience of Latin America and the Caribbean has a vital role in delivering the low-carbon growth, resource efficiency and ecosystem management the entire world must deliver to make it happen. I hope that in the course of this conference I will discover and be able to share, many more examples of how that can be achieved.

Thank you.

1,400 words / 12 minutes