

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

Opening statement of the High-level experts segment

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Cartagena, Colombia

28 March 2016

Excellency Gabriel Vallejo López, Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development of Colombia;

Excellency Enrique Lendo, Chair of the XIX Meeting of the Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean;

Distinguished delegates of the Latin America and the Caribbean countries;

Dear colleagues of the UN System and other international and regional organisations;

Ladies and gentlemen:

Let me begin by expressing our sincere gratitude to the people and Government of Colombia, and to the city of Cartagena de las Indias, for hosting the XX Meeting of the Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean. I recognise the tremendous efforts of the teams in Colombia and UNEP whose hard work guarantees that the conditions are set for a successful meeting. I would also like to express appreciation to all the governments for their untiring support and work including in preparing input for draft decisions and documents for this meeting.

I started my UN career over 24 years ago in UNEP's Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean in Mexico and have served under three of the four Regional Directors, Jose Lizarraga, Arsenio Rodriguez Mercardo and Ricardo Sanchez Sosa. I was a colleagues of the fourth Regional Director, Margarita Astralaga. I pay homage to my predecessors and intend to use the knowledge I have gained from them and build on their legacy. With your support and guidance, I am sure that we can have major impact supporting the countries of the region in achieving their sustainable development goals.

Almost thirty three years have passed since the first meeting of this Forum was held in 1982. During this time, this Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin American and the Caribbean has emerged as the leading political voice of this region on environmental sustainability. The Forum also contributed to strengthening and streamlining the environment in development planning at both the national and regional levels; fostered regional cooperation on priority issues for the region; supported a regional policy dialogue to increase the influence of the region in the

global agenda and helping the countries of the region build synergies and share a vision of inclusive sustainable development that is in harmony with nature.

It has been just two years since the forum met in Los Cabos. During the last two years, the Heads of State and Government have adopted major multilateral agreements that set the basis to make the transformational and universal change needed to achieve sustainable development, contributing to eradicate poverty and improve well-being within the limits of our planet: more than a year ago the international community adopted the Samoa Pathway; in June 2014 the world's first ever UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) met in Nairobi and in two months' time, we will be gathering at its second session; in February 2015, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction was agreed; the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development was endorsed; last September the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted; and only three months ago, the UN Climate Change Conference adopted the Paris Agreement.

These agreements set the stage for action. It is time to implement all these agreements and I am sure that the results of your discussions during these four days will contribute to boost the region towards it.

Therefore, in a time when there is no doubt that environmental sustainability should be a fundamental tenet if we are to achieve a sustainable future, your voice and leadership as environmental ministries and the collective action of this forum is of utmost relevance.

In the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the role of the Ministries of Environment is key to promote an integrated approach, ensuring that interlinkages among the three dimensions of sustainable development are recognized and considered in the decision-making processes. Latin America and the Caribbean is in a position to make contributions of paramount importance to the global agenda through regional cooperation and action.

The Forum should contribute to strengthen cooperation, coordination, dialogue, convergence, articulation, harmonization and complementarity of national public policies on environmental matters, as well as the generation and implementation of plans, policies and regional programmes to address common problems and encourage public policies in priority areas such as: sustainable development, environmental cooperation and poverty eradication.

This will promote a vision of integral and inclusive development that ensures sustainable and productive development, in harmony with nature, in such areas in which the countries of the region can build synergies, to attain sustainable development.

During this meeting, you will have the opportunity to follow-up the implementation of the decisions adopted by the Ministers of Environment in their last meeting and prepare the recommendations to be considered by the Ministers, including the update of the regional environment agenda, the ILAC; strengthening the cooperation and action on climate change, chemicals and waste, air quality and sustainable consumption and production; following-up on the negotiation of a legally binding agreement to

implement Rio Principle 10, and ways to strengthen the cooperation with the Small Island Development States of the region.

You will also discuss the main issues under the UNEA-2 agenda. We are fortunate to have with us the Permanent Representative of Cuba to UNEP in Nairobi, His Excellency Ambassador Raúl Rodríguez, to help us understand the status of preparation. It is important to note that the LAC region will chair the UNEA-2 and I am confident that, with our rich diversity of approaches and innovation, relevant contributions from the region can be made to the discussion on how to effectively integrate the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs, including on the linkages between health and environment, the UNEP Medium Term Strategy and Programme of Work. The results of the discussion should also contribute to the follow-up and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda at the global and regional level.

In order to ensure continuous collaboration and coordination between the Committee of Permanent Representatives of GRULAC in Nairobi and the Environment and Foreign Affairs focal points in each country, UNEP is establishing a “Community of Practice” within the UNEP LIVE system so that the position of each country can be reflected by GRULAC in its representation at CPR meetings. Such a system would have been very helpful to the countries in preparation for UNEA2. I will soon send an invitation to participate in this Community of Practice to all countries.

Once the new ILAC is adopted, there will be need to advance on two major tasks: the mobilization of resources, national, regional and international, towards its implementation; and, revising the current ILAC indicators and working on indicators, taking into account the need for enhanced harmonisation between the ILAC and the SDGs indicators, based on the priorities, most relevant topics and the different capacity building needs across the region.

We should be conscious of the enormous responsibility that the environmental community faces in leading the process towards the full embedment of environmental sustainability in the attainment of the universally applicable Sustainable Development Goals, which should balance the environmental, social and economic dimensions of sustainable development.

I invite you to have an open dialogue and build regional proposals to enrich the global dialogue, strengthen regional cooperation and the exchange of experiences with other regions of the world.

The world stands at a cross roads. Pivotal to the success of international efforts to move forward on sustainable development and climate change will be how principles translate into policy at the international, regional and national levels. And it is only when we see key sustainability principles translated into national development planning in all the development models applied by governments in the region that we will know our common efforts have paid off.

The world needs Latin America and the Caribbean to fulfil its global leadership potential. This Forum of Ministers has the potential to establish the foundation of ideas and vision for this region to be the leader that the world needs it to be at this crucial junction for our planet. We can together, broaden our partnerships, Influence the flow

of resources in the region to critical development needs, move our societies on the path to decarbonisation, renewable energy and resource efficiency and towards jointly achieving the sustainable development goals and objectives of the various international agreements including, the Paris Accord at COP 21, the Sendai Framework and the SAMOA pathway.

UNEP, as Secretariat of the Forum, stands ready to continue supporting your efforts and facilitating this dialogue and regional cooperation, in coordination with the other agencies members of the Interagency Technical Committee.

I wish you success in your deliberations.

Thank you,

Gracias,

Obrigado,

Merci.