



**XXII Meeting of the Forum of Ministers of Environment
of Latin America and the Caribbean
Bridgetown, Barbados**

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BRIDGETOWN DECLARATION

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

THE BRIDGETOWN DECLARATION
OF THE XXII MEETING OF THE FORUM OF MINISTERS OF THE ENVIRONMENT OF LATIN
AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN
AND
A CALL FOR ACTION ON THE ENVIRONMENTAL DIMENSION OF COVID-19
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT RECOVERY IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

General Introduction

1. The Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean met on the 1st and 2nd of February 2021, virtually for the first time in its history, during the Covid-19 pandemic, which has impacted severely Latin America and the Caribbean, claiming many lives in the region and negatively affecting our economies and environment.¹
2. *Conveys* 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, that add to the difficulties associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, and reiterate that as the global mean temperature increase and the effects of global climate accelerate and deepen the effects of climate change, Latin America and the Caribbean will increasingly continue to experience, more frequent and intense meteorological phenomena including, droughts, floods, hurricanes, , as well as sea level rise, loss of productivity in crops among others, which is a constant reminder of the threats posed by global climate change to all countries, in particular those that more vulnerable to the effects of climate change and the potential it has to undermine Sustainable Development Goals.
3. *Alarmed* by the devastating economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in Latin America and the Caribbean, which affected many economic sectors on which the peoples of the hemispheres' livelihoods depend, including but not limited to the tourism sector, unveiled how fragile the international value chains are.
4. *Consider* that the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted inequalities which exist in our countries; and amongst countries of Latin America and the Caribbean and the world, stressing the importance of global multilateralism to advance our sustainable development efforts and solve global problems, more than ever and the need to reinforce

¹ As of 27 December 2020 there have been over 79.2 million cases and over 1.7 million deaths reported since the start of the pandemic at global level <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/weekly-epidemiological-update---29-december-2020> . In the region at least 18,287,000 reported infections **and 576,000** reported deaths caused by the novel coronavirus in Latin America and the Caribbean as of 26 January 2021.
<https://graphics.reuters.com/world-coronavirus-tracker-and-maps/regions/latin-america-and-the-caribbean/>

solidarity links and international cooperation between peoples, strengthen, and ensure the adequate provision of means of implementation to help the most fragile countries to tackle the crisis, reinforcing the resilience of people and communities, in particular in developing countries;

5. *Emphasize* the role of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals as fundamental roadmaps to achieve sustainable development in its economic, social and environmental dimensions, and reiterating that eradicating poverty remains the core objective of our sustainable development efforts.
6. *Reaffirm* the principles of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, adopted by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, including principle 7, about common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities.
7. *Reaffirm* the international cooperation to contribute to the national efforts for the implementation of the decisions that are approved in the framework of this Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Rebuilding Better While Tackling Many of the Underlying Weaknesses in our Countries

8. *Underline* that the regional COVID-19 economic and social recovery strategies should consider sustainability at their core, in its three dimensions - environmental, social, and economic -, guided by inclusive and resilient development growth and focusing on accelerating environmental and climate action.
9. *Stress that* the support for economic sectors that rely on the sustainable use of natural resources, including but not limited to tourism, should be one of the priority areas in the COVID-19 sustainable recovery strategies, and protocols in order to support local livelihoods and address the environmental, social and economic challenges of our region, while considering the need to ensure the protection of travellers and workers, as well as ensure conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, and the promotion of sustainable tourism.
10. *Underscore* that at the core of the Latin America and the Caribbean COVID-19 pandemic sustainable recovery strategies, countries of the region need to turn this crisis into an opportunity to urgently and sustainably integrate the environmental dimension and include better conservation and sustainable use of natural resources into economic and social development planning of the countries, as well as across economic sectors, in accordance with national circumstances and priorities.
11. *Highlight* that in the current pandemic scenario, transfer of technology, capacity building and the access to adequate financial support will play a central role in fostering a sustainable and resilient approach to our regional recovery efforts.
12. *Highlight* the need to develop innovative financial mechanisms to foster sustainable development, such as payment for environmental services schemes, taking into account

the importance of natural resources and their economic valuation and benefits of human activities that contribute to the provision of environmental services, as well as encouraging public and private sector participation in resource mobilization.

13. Also *highlight* the need to develop innovative financial mechanisms to support the transition of the current production systems towards sustainable development, integrating environmental externalities that contribute to the provision of goods and services, as well as encouraging public and private sector participation in resource mobilization.
14. *Consider* that the economic recovery from the crisis generated by COVID-19 needs to integrate the environmental dimension, without the impact of the pandemic slowing down the ability of governments to allocate resources to promote sustainable development, guaranteeing the Principle of No Regression Environmental. We must take advantage of the current context to establish the foundations of a sustainable, inclusive and without obstacles economic system, respecting the right to development of countries and international cooperation. Public and private investment, and the international financial system, including institutions Multilateral financial institutions, funds, banks and investors play a key role in economic reactivation and must also incorporate this variable, participating in promoting solutions for environmental conservation and climate action.
15. *Consider* that the economic reactivation *seeks* social inclusion, promoting low carbon and resilient economies, conservation and management and sustainable use of natural resources, considering joint synergies in search of harmony among the actions implemented in the different sectors.
16. *Consider* that economic, fiscal, and financial packages and recovery investments should be strategically designed and planned to stimulate sustainable development efforts bringing short-term high economic impact and long-term sustainable consumption and production patterns to ensure the region meets the goals of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, the UNFCCC and its Paris Agreement and the Convention on Biological Diversity and the ongoing negotiations on the Post 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.
17. *Recognize* the importance of strengthening the mechanisms that make it possible to enhance the promotion and protection of human rights in environmental matters for people, groups and organizations, taking into account applicable international law and the respect of the sovereignty of all our countries.
18. *Further* recognize the need to continue working towards the strengthening of environmental governance and the enforcement of environmental law in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, including but not limited to mechanisms for the access to information environmental participation and justice and elaboration of public environmental policies, with a view to providing access to the benefits of ecosystem services and ensuring a healthy and sustainable environment for present and future generations.

Contextualising the linkage between emerging infectious diseases and the need for Ecosystem Restoration

19. *Conscious* that the pandemic generated by COVID-19 falls within the category of emerging infectious diseases (EIDs) known as 'zoonotic diseases', and that EIDs can significantly impact global economies and public health.
20. *Recognise* that in order to reduce the risk of future pandemics originating from zoonotic diseases Latin American and the Caribbean need to improve the state of knowledge on the linkages between environmental degradation and human health, taking into account developing countries' circumstances and capacity needs and their social and economic challenges; undertake greater efforts in the conservation and sustainable use of wildlife; and fight illegal wildlife trade, being conscious that environmental degradation increases the risk of emergence of zoonotic diseases.
21. *Highlight* that social vulnerability increases the risk of disease transmission and emphasize that poverty alleviation through the promotion of sustainable livelihoods plays a significant role in reducing the risk of emergence of zoonotic diseases.
22. *Highlight* that food and nutritional security is essential to strengthen societies' capacity to respond to zoonotic diseases and that efforts to reduce the risk of emergence of zoonotic diseases should aim to secure global food supplies, while improving and consolidating sustainable food systems;
23. *Undertake* efforts in the fight against illegal trafficking in order to reduce the risk of future pandemics caused by zoonotic diseases, at the same time strengthening the conservation of wildlife, taking into account that ecosystems degradation increases the risk of appearance and spread of zoonotic diseases.
24. *Highlight* the importance of generating environmental and territorial data and information for decision-making by governments and policymakers, in the comprehensive management of the territory that promotes the conservation, recovery and sustainable use of ecosystems and natural resources, and the reduction of vulnerability and climate change impacts.
25. *Recognise* the importance of promoting sustainable consumption and production patterns to achieve resource efficiency and reduce environmental degradation, through access to evidence-based information and citizen participation, and promoting environmental education, environmental governance and environmental awareness.
26. *Further Recognise* that in order to reduce the risk of future zoonotic diseases, both the immediate and underlying pressures of biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation must be addressed in an integrated, effective, targeted sustained manner, and with the largest levels of international cooperation to tackle wildlife trafficking and illegal deforestation while reinforcing sustainable forest management in accordance with national legislation.
27. *Hereby* welcome the *Latin America and Caribbean Action Plan on Ecosystem Restoration*, which aims of supporting and scaling up efforts at all levels to prevent, halt

and reverse the degradation of ecosystems in Latin America and the Caribbean and raise awareness on the importance of successful ecosystem restoration and commit to facilitate mobilization of adequate resources, including from multilateral funding mechanisms such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and Green Climate Fund (GCF); thereby contributing to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and multilateral environmental agreements, leaving no one behind.

Underscoring the importance and necessity of Regional Cooperation

28. *Reiterate* the importance of international and regional cooperation that would serve as a mechanism to mitigate the countries' vulnerabilities, build resilience and maximize opportunities for sustainable development and contribute to the economic and environmental recovery of our Region.
29. *Take note* that the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic teaches us to work together to combat the common challenges to planet and humanity, recognising that coordinated and time-oriented efforts can strengthen sustainability and form the basis for the creation of adequate strategies for long-term benefit including sustainable environmental management and joint efforts between countries and organizations, oriented to such objectives, alike.
30. *Strengthen* sustainability efforts and formulate strategies among countries and multilateral organizations for long term benefits, recognizing joint and coordinated efforts, including a global response to address common challenges that threaten ecosystems and humankind due to the COVID 19 pandemic.
31. *Stress* the need to promote on-going dialogues and exchange of information among Latin America and the Caribbean on best practices for natural resource management, including sustainable forest management, and the implementation of ecosystem-based approaches, among other relevant approaches² that provide adaptation benefits, mitigation co-benefits and foster the conservation of biodiversity.

Enhancing the Implementation Outcomes of the Forum of Ministers

32. *Underscore* the need to strengthen the implementation of the decisions and results of the Forum of Ministers of Environment as well as the overall functioning of this forum, and towards this end decide to explore flexible options for the strengthening of the Forum of Ministers with increased engagement of countries, as well as the optimization of the role of the Inter-Agency Technical Committee, through an intergovernmental consultation process to be conducted during the intersessional period.

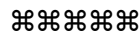
² Relevant approaches include Nature based solutions, which does not have an internationally agreed definition, some countries consider that the concept is a potential adaptation and mitigation measure.

33. *Establish* a Working Group to enhance the outcome effectiveness from the Forum of Ministers of the Environment for Latin America and the Caribbean. This Working Group shall present recommendations to the next Intersessional Meeting.
34. *Call* upon UNEP and other Members of the Interagency Technical Committee , to the extent practicable, support with the mobilisation of resources to facilitate the strengthening of a Forum of Ministers as a means of increasing the implementation capacity of the forum.
35. *Further Agree* that the Bureau of the Forum of Ministers of the Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean shall provide oversight of the functioning of the Forum along with the Director of UNEP/ROLAC and hence is required to meet, at a minimum, every six months to provide oversight, monitor and review the implementation of the outcomes of the Forum, and to conduct the work of the Forum during the intersessional period.)

Responding to the Needs of the Situation

36. *Conscious* of the gravity of the current situation, acknowledge the leadership driven by the Bureau of the XXII Meeting and the work done by the Argentine Republic and Grenada in consolidating a COMMUNIQUE ON THE ENVIRONMENTAL DIMENSION OF THE COVID-19 CRISIS, which is hereby adopted as part of this Declaration.
37. *Further acknowledge* the work undertaken by the Negotiation Committee of the XXII Forum and commit to work towards the implementation of the Decisions adopted at this Forum, which express our common ambition to contribute to the advancement of sustainable development in our region.
38. *Request* the Minister of Environment and National Beautification of Barbados as President to the XXII Meeting of the Forum of Ministers of Environment to representing and transmit the Forum's regional outcomes to the Fifth United Nations Environment Assembly which will take place in February 2021 and early 2022, as well as to the Forum of Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development and the High Level Political Forum, and other relevant regional and subregional fora.
39. *Appreciate* the support of the Regional Office of Latin America and the Caribbean of the United Nations Environment Programme as Secretariat of this Forum and request the Regional Director and the Interagency Technical Committee of the Forum to support the implementation of the actions set out in this declaration and decisions adopted by the Forum.
40. *Express* our deepest gratitude to and to commend the Government and the people of Barbados for the exceptional leadership and hard work during the intersessional period, considering the challenging times that we are facing due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the adaptation of our work to the virtual modality to carry out the works and obtain

a successful outcome during the XXII Meeting of the Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean.



COMMUNIQUE ON THE ENVIRONMENTAL DIMENSIONS OF THE COVID 19 CRISIS

The world faces an unprecedented crisis due to the current COVID-19 pandemic which forces us to reflect on the importance of **human health** and its interrelation with unsustainable patterns of consumption and production. This crisis further evidences that the equilibrium of our ecosystem is impacted by the way we use our natural resources.

Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean have made great efforts in securing the health of our population while at the same time trying to preserve jobs and reactivating the economy. In this difficult scenario, where preserving lives is the foremost priority for States, we consider that the social, environmental and economic dimensions must be incorporated also as a central axis to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic.

Likewise, the pandemic has unleashed various crises that challenge us and allows us to promote innovative approaches to take advantage of a **window of opportunity** to integrate the environmental dimension during and into post-pandemic economic recovery packages.

The need to **accelerate environmental and climate action** has become evident and require the incorporation of environmental considerations and solutions, integrated into the post COVID-19 recovery plans as a priority, while at the same time addressing the social and economic challenges of our region and developing innovative mechanisms to foster the sustainable use of natural resources and support local livelihoods . In this framework, the articulation of multilateral agendas can be a key factor to boost national efforts in the wake of the current crisis.

The region holds natural resources or elements which are the basis of livelihoods of millions of people and are essential to the functioning of a diversity of productive sectors. In this sense, it is necessary for countries of Latin America and the Caribbean to place fair, equitable and inclusive transition in the center of their agenda, to ensure the creation of jobs, and the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystem services and products, through adequate actions and policies.

Considering the current and future impacts of climate change throughout the region, our capacity to respond and adapt to the climate crises will need to increase significantly, as we incorporate the environmental dimension into national policy, we would promote the wellbeing of the population.

Mainstreaming sustainability , promoting good practices, and the integration of biodiversity in productive sectors, sustainable infrastructure projects, technological scientific advancements

and ecosystem-based approaches³ have never been more important , to improve and consolidate a balanced approach) between the economic, social and environmental dimensions, pursuant to the 2030 Agenda, which places the eradication of poverty at the centre of global efforts to promote sustainable development.

Furthermore, strategies for post-COVID-19 sustainable recovery provide an opportunity to enhance the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development and could deliver benefits both for the economy and the environment, opening new avenues for investment opportunities that would foster innovation, promote new businesses, and create new sustainable jobs.

In this sense, it is important to establish the decisions of the XXII Meeting of the Forum of Ministers of Environment that highlighted the importance for regional cooperation focused on priority topics including the sound management of chemicals and waste, sustainable consumption and production , climate change and biodiversity and ecosystems.

Considering that COVID-19 has a major impact on a global scale and in Latin American and Caribbean countries, so it is imperative that countries articulate effective and strategic responses that provide solutions to combating rising inequalities due to regional and global economic slowdown, and that at the environmental level the implementation of national sustainable development programmes and the UNFCCC and its Paris Agreement will not be jeopardized , including the participation of women and minority groups, must be strengthened both institutionally and at the community level. Environmental, economic, and social empowerment, given the above, will therefore be promoted with a gender approach to the participation of social groups in conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and care for the environment.

It should also be noted that countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have engaged in significant regional cooperation efforts⁴to strengthen the region's capacity to address environmental challenges, to improve and implement good management practices of protected areas, and to achieve the goals set out in international instruments such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and its Aichi Targets and the UNFCCC and its Paris Agreement, and other regional and subregional initiatives, through ecosystem- based approaches and other relevant approaches, to the problems afflicting global society.

Within this context, the **Bureau of the Forum of Ministers of Environment in its meeting of 29 May 2020** reflected on the environmental dimensions of the crisis and asked the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) support in the recovery from the crisis caused by COVID-19.

³ Relevant approaches include Nature based solutions, which does not have an internationally agreed definition; some countries consider that the concept is a potential adaptation and mitigation measure.

⁴ In pursuit of the objectives of the aforementioned environmental agreements, countries of the region are parties to several regional initiatives aimed at such ends, related to protected areas, terrestrial and marine natural areas, biodiversity, and ecosystem services, among others.

These deliberations are the **basis for the consolidation of the following commitments:**

- **An integrated view of health.** COVID-19 is a reminder that human health is dependent on sustainable patterns of consumption and production. To prevent future crisis, we must address the threats to ecosystems, including habitat and biodiversity loss, illegal wildlife trade, illegal deforestation, pollution, and climate change.
- **Our lives have changed, but our goals remain even more valid and urgent.** The pandemic has exposed the many fragilities of our economies, and has widened social inequalities, highlighting the need to improve our sustainable relationship with the environment, implement more resilient and innovative actions, and to increase regional and international cooperation and solidarity and provide adequate means of implementation, in accordance with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities. The economic consequences of the pandemic, which have mostly affected developing countries and have proven financially burdensome across our region, recall the need for developed countries to fulfil their development assistance obligations. In light of the current scenario, transfer of technology, capacity building and financial support will play a central role in fostering a sustainable and resilient approach to our recovery efforts.
- **Regional cooperation.** The pandemic also underscored the need to enhance and maximize cooperation between our countries. The scale and complexity of the challenges requires concerted and tailored regional and sub-regional efforts. The Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean provides a framework of action to achieve common positions. The development of regional networks, including the recent recommendation to UNEP on a voluntary regional Environment and Emergency Preparedness Network, is part of a drive to strengthen regional cooperation in all dimensions of environmental management and integration.
- Likewise, collaboration on environmental governance ,inter alia, strengthening the enforcement of environmental law, access to information and citizen participation and access to environmental justice, based on the respect of the sovereignty of all our states, environmental education, the promotion of gender equality and environment, the implementation of public policies on environmental issues, research, and the exchange of experiences and knowledge and good practices that can contribute to implementation of Multilateral Environmental agreements in the region, needs to be strengthened and extended.
- **Ecosystem-based approaches.** The need to address the threats to ecosystems and wildlife, and implications for human health is a matter of urgency. Ecosystem-based approaches and other relevant approaches for environmental management and climate actions can be effective to promote healthy ecosystems and provide benefits for human health and the social and economic development of communities, where restoration of biodiversity and implementation of ecosystem- based approaches are essential to meet the Sustainable Development Goals.
- **The measures that incorporate climate proof-actions** can be an important dimension of the post-COVID-19 recovery plans, through the implementation of a climate-resilient, low-emission regional economy that generates sustainable jobs,

produces short-term high economic impact, attracts investments in the region and leaves no one behind.

In this regard, we request UNEP to provide technical assistance and transfer of methodologies for the design and planning for post COVID-19 recovery response measures, providing information to serve as a basis for decision-makers.

- **It is necessary to promote Sustainable Consumption and Production models**, as well as the development and implementation of integrated urban and territorial planning approaches to achieve sustainable, efficient, resilient, and inclusive cities. Sustainable Consumption as well as the creation of regional value chains and the promotion of regional trade with added value should be incentivized.

In this regard, we request UNEP to draw on evidence as to how the measures steering towards sustainable consumption and production patterns deliver more growth, more jobs, higher short-term returns per dollar spent, leveraging higher private investments, increasing long-term cost savings, improving health, and reducing environmental and climate impacts as compared to conventional stimulus packages.

- **Sound Waste management needs to be consolidated as an essential service and key sector to better recovery.** The sound management and final disposal of waste, including biological-infectious waste, is essential to respond to emergencies such as the COVID-19 outbreak, in order to minimize secondary impacts on health and the environment. At the same time, strengthening the sector, by addressing and reducing inappropriate management practices, such as dumpsites, waste incineration, and transitioning to integrated models based on waste prevention and resource recovery, in accordance with national priorities and capacities, provide opportunities for sustainable growth and the creation of jobs. At the same time, access to clean water and sanitation remains a fundamental area of work for the environment and health agenda.
- **The countries of the region place a significant amount of importance on ensuring food security.** Restoring degraded lands in the region is a priority and we welcome the Regional Plan for Ecosystems Restoration.
- **Sustainable ocean-based economies** should be considered for effective actions that enable the conservation and sustainable use of ocean, marine and coastal resources towards the sustainable development of countries in the region. In doing so, an integrated approach to public policies in fisheries, agriculture, maritime transport, tourism, and marine minerals is needed.
- **Tourism** has been drastically affected by the pandemic. For the Caribbean, the most tourism dependent region of the world, the reactivation of the tourism industry is a critical component of economic recovery. Ongoing Sustainable Tourism programmes should be adapted and new ones have to be put in place to assist countries in designing and implementing the needed changes, including the formulation of strategies towards a sustainable, innovative, and resilient tourism industry within the recovery plans.
- **The promotion of the strengthening of the Science - Policy interface**, is a fundamental instrument for objective and well-informed decision-making, using science and technological evidence, monitoring of policy responses and outcomes, particularly

in the context of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as other global and regional agreements.

- **The access to financing** should also be the backbone of recovery plans to strengthen the environmental and social dimension in the real economy and address the financial constraints that affect our countries' capacity to foster sustainable development including but not limited to reducing the debt burden, by helping the transition of productive sectors, the creation of jobs- and development of resilient infrastructure projects. States should consider innovative financial mechanisms that could support local communities, such as the payment for ecosystem services, among others.
- **The uncertainty that we face, offers hope for the future.** We can make decisions that generate substantial long-term changes and serve as the impetus to move towards more sustainable lifestyles, including consumption and production. In this sense, the Forum of Ministers of the Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean is determined to work at these points of convergence. To do this, we commit our best efforts towards coordinated and joint action that allows us to transform this vision into concrete actions to recover and transform the social, economic, and environmental reality of our region.

