

Closing of the Sixty-second Meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean

Speech by Ana Güzmes García, Chief of the Division for Gender Affairs

January 27th, 2022

Ministers, representatives of ECLAC member States,
Representatives of the United Nations System and international organizations,
Distinguished representatives of civil society organizations, particularly women's and feminist organizations and movements,

Friends from academia, from the media, delegates,

Good afternoon to everyone

First of all, I would like to share with you a few words from Ms. Alicia Bárcena, who offers her apologies for not being able to be here now, as she is at the launching event of the "Social Panorama of Latin America 2021".

She especially asked me to thank you all for each and every one of the messages of love and gratitude that you have expressed towards her. I would also like to express her recognition to the contributions and the collective construction made by all of you during these two days of work. With great emotion and commitment, she is grateful for the invitation extended by Marita Perceval on behalf of the Government of Argentina to open the XV Regional Conference on Women. Moreover, she says she will certainly continue to work together with us, advancing towards the Care Society as a horizon.

Dear colleagues,

After two days of intense and fruitful work, the **Sixty-second Meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean** has come to an end. It is an honor for me to conclude this intergovernmental meeting, so necessary for sharing progress and challenges on the road to substantive equality in the region. **A space to promote political dialogue and cooperation for regional integration towards a transformative recovery with**

gender equality and sustainability. And a space to outline the path towards the care society, our common horizon.

I would like to extend a special welcome to the Minister of Women and Gender Equity of Chile, Monica Zalaquett, for her leadership and guidance during the meeting in her capacity as Chair of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean. This is her last meeting as Minister and, as she mentioned yesterday, we will surely meet in other spaces. I would like to acknowledge your commitment and tireless work as Chair of this subsidiary body of ECLAC throughout this period of permanent challenges in the face of the pandemic. Your willingness and attitude of dialogue and exchange with the other ministers and women's authorities was extremely enriching.

I also welcome our dear colleague María-Noel Vaeza, Regional Director for the Americas and the Caribbean of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), with whom for the second time, we have organized the consultation session prior to the CSW, this time for CSW66, strengthening our partnership in a clear sign of the implementation of the UN common agenda, and of the time aligned with the pacts and alliances that we want to forge together with you. I also welcome María Cristina Perceval, Secretary for Equality and Diversity Policies of the Ministry for Women, Gender and Diversity of Argentina, in her capacity as country representative and Vice-Chair of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean and Vice-Chair of the Commission on the Status of Women on behalf of the Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC). I would like to thank the three of them and their teams for their joint work in preparing this intergovernmental meeting that is so necessary to promote political dialogue and cooperation in this challenging context for the countries of our region.

Friends,

Today we conclude two days of fruitful discussions and agreements that guide the preparations for the XV Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean and the region's position for the 66CSW, that will have as its priority theme "Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and

programmes.” Two days that also guide our work in favor of gender equality and sustainable development in the short, medium and long term, and that mark the path towards our common horizon: the care society.

We had very enriching reflections and debates and visited all the topics we had proposed; we had more than 640 people registered, 33 delegations from member states and 6 from associate members of ECLAC.

We have a lot of great results to share:

We have adopted a series of agreements to continue advancing towards the XV Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, to be held in the first week of November of this year in Argentina. The theme will be "The care society: horizon for a sustainable recovery with gender equality". I would especially like to thank María Cristina Perceval for her presence at this meeting. We know of her tremendous contribution to gender equality for women and girls, both in United Nations spaces and as part of the government of Argentina. My gratitude goes to her work and with it my recognition to the Government of Argentina for welcoming us as the hosts of our next Regional Conference.

In addition, we have prepared a joint declaration in response to climate change and disasters, environmental sustainability, and gender equality to bring before the Sixty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women to be held in March of this year in New York. Many of you will participate in that session and will be able to bring the vision of Latin America and the Caribbean through the **Declaration adopted by Ministers and High Authorities of the national machineries for the advancement of women in Latin America and the Caribbean for the Sixty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW66)**. It is a milestone that the prior consultation takes place within the framework of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Women and strengthens us as a region.

After the interesting interventions we had during the Panel on Climate Change and the Panel on Disaster Risk, it has become clear that dealing with climate change and disasters is one of the great challenges we face as a regional and international community, and this does not allow any further delays. Recovery must be sustainable and with equality on the horizon. This requires the promotion of mitigation and

adaptation actions, actions that are coordinated at the international, regional, national and subnational levels.

These actions are clearly linked to policies that place care for the planet and people at the center of sustainable development. And this undoubtedly implies linking and highlighting the importance of care as part of human rights, ensuring that all people have access to quality care and that those who provide care have their rights guaranteed. It also implies understanding care as an essential element for life, which cannot be settled only in the private sphere and cannot simply be a personal or family resolution; care has a social, economic and environmental structural dimension that must be addressed as a whole. This is why we speak of the Care Society.

Colleagues:

I am pleased that the governments of the region have ratified the proposal to build a society of care that will allow us a new style of transformative and sustainable development after almost two years of profound health, economic and social crisis. A crisis, as we have already said, that also gives us the opportunity to rethink our coexistence, the pacts and agreements for a life together, our common agenda. After reflecting on how the crisis affects the life of the planet and the lives of people, especially women; after measuring the impacts it has on the daily life of each household and community, and after thinking and promoting policies that help a transformative recovery, it has become clear that gender equality is crucial for the sustainability of life.

This morning we launched the Social Panorama 2021 which, specifically, refers to the disproportionate impact that this pandemic has had on women's lives, given the overburden of care work and the setbacks experienced in terms of their economic autonomy. The Panorama shows how women are more sensitive to crises, since in the first year of the pandemic their labor force participation suffered 18 years of decline, reaching 47.7%. Although there have been efforts to mitigate the impacts of labor market indicators and it is predicted that by 2022 women's labor participation will reach 51%, this still means that 1 out of every 2 women does not fully participate in the labor market, which is the key to equality in our region. For those who do participate, unemployment continues to be a problem that in recent years has reached figures worse than those of the 2008 crisis (12.1 in 2020 and 11.8 in 2021).

We see that it is women who show the slowest improvement in their living conditions, as many of the economic recovery and employment revitalization strategies do not yet integrate a gender equality perspective that would allow them to re-enter the labor market on an equal footing with men. And it is the youngest women, with children between the ages of 0 and 4, who face the greatest barriers to returning to paid work, as the lack of care systems and the closure of schools and childcare centers have a direct impact on the availability of women's time and their access to the labor market.

Against this backdrop, the number of women with no income of their own has increased and continues to be significantly higher than the proportion of men in the same situation. In 2020, 25.8% (1 in 4) of women had no income of their own compared to 13.4% of men. We emphasize that non-contributory transfers, including emergency transfers, play a fundamental role in guaranteeing women's economic autonomy, particularly in the current labor market situation. Without transfers, the proportion of women without their own income would reach 36.7% (and for men it would be 17.1%).

We invite you to read the Panorama, which has an entire chapter that addresses the care society as a strategy for a transformative recovery with equality and sustainability. In this sense, it raises the importance of putting the **sustainability of life** at the center of the new style of development.

Based on the diagnosis and figures presented in the Social Panorama, ECLAC is making a series of recommendations that are part of the preparatory process and that provide ideas and proposals for the debates at our next Regional Conference on Women. These recommendations are based on the certainty that investment in the care economy has the potential to galvanize economies by generating employment and well-being within the framework of a sustainable recovery with gender equality.

The recommendations can be summarized in four areas:

- With a view to universality, **guaranteeing progressive access** to quality care services. This is crucial so that public policies do not reinforce inequalities or produce systems that are only accessible to those with higher incomes.
- We have recommended the **articulation of labor market policies with policies aimed at co-responsibility** for care between households, the State, the private

sector and communities. Public and private investment in care increases productivity, the quality and level of employment, increases the general well-being of society, reduces inequality and contributes to the diversification of the productive structure without transgressing ecological limits for the reproduction of life.

- **Interinstitutional and intersectoral coordination** between various ministries and sectors is required, as well as the participation of those who work in the area of care, and of the people in need of care. A territorial approach must also be taken into account.
- It is also necessary to ensure the **financial sustainability** of comprehensive care systems. And this implies, among other aspects, knowing the effect on employment, tax collection and income inequality gaps.

During these days we also heard that the pandemic also led to a rapid expansion of the **digital economy**. This occurred in a context where the costs associated with connecting households to the Internet (the cost of connecting to mobile broadband services in households in the first quintile represents on average 14.3% of household income) and the devices needed to ensure effective connectivity continue to be obstacles to the full digital inclusion of women.

As noted, 4 out of 10 women in the region are not connected and cannot afford connectivity. This is why we celebrate the progress made by the Regional Alliance for the Digitalization of Women to promote digital transformation processes, women's autonomy and encourage a fairer distribution of power, resources, time, wealth and work between women and men. Because digital inclusion cannot be delayed.

Efforts to close access gaps and strengthen capacities and skills to take full advantage of digital technologies are essential to boost women's labor participation and entrepreneurship. Closing the gender digital divide will lead to employing more women and incorporating new skills and talents into the economy and society, with multiplier effects for development. This is why it is very important, as was pointed out yesterday, that the countries of the region make progress in recognizing the intrinsic social value of Internet access as a public good. ECLAC reiterates its commitment, in coordination with UN Women, to continue accompanying the Alliance's efforts to close the technological gaps for women.

Today it has also become clear that we must continue working to break the statistical silence and advance in the construction of information systems that account for gender inequalities in the three dimensions of sustainable development. As has already been mentioned, what is not counted DOES NOT COUNT, and in order to achieve a transformative recovery we need evidence, innovation and to give value to that which for many years has been made invisible. In this sense, we must continue to advance in our efforts to have measurements that complement GDP and that account for the multiple dimensions of human well-being and our planetary sustainability, including care and the links between gender equality and climate change. Therefore, the coordinated work of the RCW and the SCA is crucial for the region to advance in the valuation of unpaid work, ecosystemic accounting, the inclusion of an intersectional and territorial approach to statistical production and thus be able to count on data that are transformed into relevant information to ensure the autonomy of women in our region.

Regarding the Regional Fund in Support of Women's and Feminists Organizations and Movements, the first group of women's and feminist organizations selected to receive grants to strengthen their work in the implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda will be announced in February. At this meeting, which concludes today, the innovative and multisectoral nature of this regional fund was ratified, calling on the countries and various organizations and agencies to join in the support necessary for its operation. With Mexico's contribution, the beginning is promising and invites us to reinforce our collective commitment as a region.

Friends,

To move towards the full and effective implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, we need social, political and economic agreements with the full participation of women. This is the path towards a horizon of equality and sustainability.

In this regard, we welcome the fruitful dialogue between representatives of ECLAC member states, the United Nations system, civil society and international organizations to outline actions and proposals that will enable us to promote a transformative recovery in the region with gender equality and an intersectional perspective.

We also highlight the key role of the Ministries and Machineries for the Advancement of Women in mainstreaming the gender perspective in all crisis response and mitigation measures and in promoting affirmative actions in the areas of taxation, employment, productive, economic, environmental and social policies.

Dear friends, we are going through difficult times. However, I reiterate my recognition of the courage, strength, capacity and creativity of Latin American and Caribbean women and their organizations to build and implement an ambitious, progressive and innovative Regional Gender Agenda.

I thank you for your presence today on this meeting of the Presiding Officers and I especially thank Minister Mónica Zalaquett for her excellent work as Chair of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean.

I would like to acknowledge the contribution of the high-level authorities of the ECLAC member states at each of the meetings of the Presiding Officers.

I thank my colleagues at the United Nations and other international organizations and especially Maria Noel Vaeza, Cecilia Alemany and the entire UN Women team.

I reiterate what has already been said in other instances: for us as the Secretariat of the Regional Conference on Women, the articulated work we have achieved with UN Women to accelerate the central objective of gender equality and the autonomy of all women and girls in the region is very relevant. The organization by ECLAC in coordination with UN Women of the XIV Regional Conference on Women in 2020 was a milestone in this regard. We look forward to a similarly generous and productive coordination for the next conference in Argentina.

I recognize and appreciate the permanent commitment and contributions of women's and feminist organizations in this forum. Always present, sharing a lucid and critical view that allows us to move towards more participatory agreements.

Cooperating partners and international organizations,

I would especially like to thank the Division for Gender Affairs team for their work for the realization of this Sixty-second Meeting of the Presiding Officers and for the work they have been doing and will continue to do:

Many thanks to Lucía Scuro, Nicole Bidegain, Iliana Vaca-Trigo, Diana Rodríguez, Alejandra Valdés, Camila Bustamante, Carolina Jara, Abel Venegas, Fernanda Gallo, Mariana Winocur, Fernanda Moscoso, Camila Barón, Belén Villegas, Macarena Muñoz, Florencia Aguilera, Jacinta Girardi, Marisa Weinstein, Kethelyn Ferreira, Paula Aghon, Paula Quintero and Lorena Aguilar.

I would also like to thank my colleagues at ECLAC, each of the divisions and units. In particular to STIC, David del Moral; Editorial, Sally Shaw; Public Information Unit, Guido Camu; to the subregional headquarters and national offices that have supported in various tasks, and of course to Luis Yañez and Jimena Arias and the entire team of the Commission Secretariat, with the leadership of Romain Zivy.

I would like to profoundly acknowledge and thank the UN Women team with whom we have coordinated the organization of this 62nd Meeting of the Presiding Officers. Thanks to Cecilia Alemany, Raquel Coello, Bárbara Ortiz, Magdalena Provis, and the UN Women Communications team.

In closing, I would like to reaffirm what has already been said in recent days: we have the opportunity to build an inspiring future for all women, young women, adolescents and girls. It is urgent to redistribute time, resources, power and work in order to move towards a new style of development based on gender equality and sustainability. We are facing a change of era. The care society is the horizon to which I invite you to walk towards.

Together we can do more and better for a sustainable, inclusive and resilient recovery in Latin America and the Caribbean. **I repeat once again: the post-pandemic recovery of Latin America and the Caribbean will be feminist or it will not be.** And this is a change of era. A civilizational leap to a feminist era.

I quote in this closing speech the remarkable Berta Cáceres, of the Lenca people, emblematic defender of the environment and of life. Berta received the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize in 2015 and in her thank you speech she honored us with this call to action:

Let us wake up! Let us wake up humankind! We're out of time.

We must shake our conscience free of the rapacious capitalism, racism, and patriarchy that will only assure our own self-destruction

... Our Mother Earth, militarized, fenced-in, poisoned, a place where basic rights are systematically violated, demands that we take action.

Let us build societies that are able to coexist in dignified in a way that protects life. Let us come together and remain hopeful as we defend and care for the blood of this Earth and of its spirits.¹

Friends,

LONG LIVE BUTTERFLIES!

¹ Source: Berta Caceres acceptance speech, 2015 Goldman Prize ceremony. Available here: <https://www.xplorhonduras.com/discurso-de-berta-caceres-premio-goldman-2015/> and here: <https://www.goldmanprize.org/recipient/berta-caceres/>