

The Escazú Agreement: An Environmental Milestone for Latin America and the Caribbean

Alicia Bárcena*

Our societies increasingly demand more and better access to adequate and reliable information, along with more and better opportunities to participate in a meaningful way in the decisions that affect them.

To support this shift to more equitable, inclusive and sustainable development, Latin America and the Caribbean today has an unprecedented multilateral instrument: the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters, also known as the “Escazú Agreement.” Adopted in March of this year in Escazú, Costa Rica, this agreement offers our States and societies a pioneering platform for advancing toward full access to information, to participation that goes beyond consultation, and to environmental justice.

In seeking to guarantee the right of present and future generations to a healthy environment and to sustainable development, the Escazú Agreement aims to strengthen capacities and bolster cooperation among the countries of the region. It also expresses our shared priorities and aspirations and demonstrates the continued relevance of regional multilateralism to sustainable development.

And the region has good reason to feel proud of this instrument: in addition to being the only treaty to have emerged from Rio+20, it is the first regional environmental treaty in Latin America and the Caribbean and the only one of its kind in containing specific provisions for the promotion and protection of defenders of human rights in environmental matters. This is of special relevance in one of the most critical regions for those who defend the environment and the land.

Negotiated by and for the region, with significant participation by the public and with the support of ECLAC in its role as technical secretariat, the Escazú Agreement aims to reach the most vulnerable, marginalized and excluded sectors through affirmative measures, and it aspires to remove the barriers that impede or hinder the full exercise of rights. This is a faithful expression of the last goal of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: to not leave anyone behind.

Moving toward more just and sustainable development models with the timely and informed participation of all sectors of society will be essential for tackling issues as urgent as climate vulnerability, the rise in disasters (particularly in the Caribbean and in Central America), ocean acidification, soil erosion and the loss of biodiversity.

In that sense, we recall that it was at the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit, in 1992, where the three main multilateral environmental treaties of the United Nations were conceived

(climate change, biodiversity and desertification). Twenty-six years later, our region is making history once again.

On September 27, the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean will have the historic opportunity to put themselves at the vanguard of sustainable development with equality. That day, our countries will be able to sign and ratify the Escazú Agreement at the United Nations General Assembly in New York, strengthening their commitment to a more prosperous, inclusive and equitable region.

With the determined support of all, the Escazú Agreement will soon become synonymous with greater democracy, transparency and well-being. The countries and peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean will always be able to count on ECLAC to assist in this noble and necessary endeavor.

*Executive Secretary of ECLAC

www.cepal.org

Prensa@cepal.org