

Remarks by Alicia Bárcena, Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), at the regional consultation session prior to the sixty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women

Wednesday, 26 January

(Virtual meeting)

Ministers and high-level authorities, representatives of ECLAC member States, representatives of international organizations and of women's and feminist organizations, good afternoon.

I am honoured to open this special regional consultation session prior to the sixty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women. For the second year running, this consultation is being carried out in conjunction with UN-Women, under the umbrella of the regional intergovernmental space offered by the meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Women.

This is a tremendous achievement and sets an example for international cooperation and multilateralism, with a new and revitalized role for regional integration in the framework of *Our Common Agenda*, the report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Allow me also to highlight the key contribution the region has made in international intergovernmental forums and agreements, particularly in the Commission on the Status of Women, ensuring that women's empowerment and gender equality are at the heart of the ensuing commitments.

Friends, I would like to extend a special welcome to **Sima Bahous, Executive Director of UN-Women**, who honours us with her presence as she attends this meeting for the first time. We hope that we will be able to meet face-to-face soon and that you will have the opportunity to attend this important meeting in person.

Under the leadership of Chile, in its capacity as Chair of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, and in collaboration with Argentina, in its capacity as Vice-Chair of the Commission on the Status of Women representing the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States (GRULAC), María-Noel Vaeza and her teams at UN-Women have worked together with ECLAC staff to prepare this intergovernmental meeting.

Latin America and the Caribbean is highly sensitive to the effects of climate change and disasters. **Furthermore, our region remains the most unequal region in the world and has been the hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic.** The sixty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women is being held against the backdrop of increasing global pressure to tackle the climate crisis, biodiversity loss, environmental degradation and environmental pollution.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, these calls for action are being made in a context of profound inequalities, **where persistent gender inequality remains a structural feature of the region, and where environmental defenders fighting to protect their lands from the prevailing extractive development model are under serious threat.**

Despite the existence of a robust international and regional normative framework on gender equality and women's autonomy in relation to climate change and disaster risk reduction, many efforts to address these issues have largely failed on implementation to make a structural impact on the closing of gender gaps. In addition, gender mainstreaming in financing and in environmental, climate change adaptation and mitigation, disaster risk management and disaster risk reduction policies remains insufficient.

In this context, Latin America and the Caribbean has the potential to become a region that transforms and promotes gender equality and women's autonomy in international decision-making spaces and in the adoption of measures and financing for the environment, climate change, disaster risk management and reduction, and sustainable development. This is because our region is the only one in the world that, for over four decades, has pursued a profound, ambitious and comprehensive Regional Gender Agenda, and because we are

home to the first-ever binding regional treaty on the environment, the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean, known as the **Escazú Agreement**.

Friends, we are facing a real change of era, with global challenges such as climate change, inequality, growing asymmetries between developed and developing countries and, now, the COVID-19 pandemic. **This forces us to undertake a profound transformation that recognizes the linkages between the economy, society and the environment and calls for greater international and regional multilateral cooperation.**

We need an urgent change in the development model to move towards a care society in which there is recognition of the interdependence between people, between productive processes and society, and that places the sustainability of human life and the planet at the centre.

This proposal has been accepted and will be the central theme of the fifteenth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean to be held this year in Argentina, as countries discuss "**The care society: horizon for a sustainable recovery with gender equality**".

Climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, inequalities, the care crisis: these are global problems.

And while the care society is still not seen as a global, regional and local response, that is what it is.

Count on ECLAC, in collaboration with UN-Women and the United Nations, to step up the effective implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda and international commitments on gender equality, women's economic, physical and decision-making autonomy, and the full enjoyment of their human rights, which will enable progress towards sustainable development, climate action, disaster risk management and reduction, and resilience-building.

ECLAC grows through and is nourished by dialogue with its member countries and with feminist and women's organizations. Together we can do more and better for a sustainable, inclusive and resilient recovery.

I say once again: this is the dawn of a new era. An urgent civilizational change towards a feminist era. When one woman advances and transforms, we all move forward, but when all women advance, society progresses. The world and women can wait no more! The time for a feminist era is now.

Thank you very much.