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Inauguration - Meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean

Good morning everyone. It is an honor to be with you today at the inauguration of the 62nd Meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, which includes the special session of the Regional Consultation prior to the 66th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).

My sincere greetings to:

- Alicia Bárcena, Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).
- Mónica Zalaquett, Minister of Women and Gender Equity of Chile and President of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- Ministers of Women and authorities of the mechanisms for the advancement of women in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- Representatives of feminist, women's and civil society organizations that have responded favorably to this call, demonstrating once again the commitment of Latin America and the Caribbean to gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.
- Representatives of the United Nations System Agencies and Cooperation Agencies.
- Friends who are with us both in this virtual room and through the social media networks, to all of you, I extend a warm welcome to this Board of Directors.

A little less than a year ago, in February 2021, we embarked on this journey of jointly organizing the Meetings of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Women. On that occasion and this one, the meeting coincided

with the Regional Consultation prior to the CSW, which concluded successfully, the same success that I hope will accompany us on this occasion.

This Meeting of the Presiding Officers is also very special because it is the last occasion we will have Mrs. Alicia Bárcena as Executive Secretary of ECLAC and Minister Mónica Zalaquett in her role as President of the Regional Conference.

We begin 2022 facing a pandemic of inequality, with a profound gender gap throughout the region. The overwhelming outflow of women from the labor force represents an 18-year setback in the progress made by women in the region in increasing their participation in the labor market, according to ECLAC's 2021 data. In 2021, according to ILO, over 13 million women lost their jobs due to the pandemic in Latin America and the Caribbean.

I am convinced of the urgency of better-incorporating women into the socioeconomic recovery, with strengthened comprehensive care systems and universal access to technology. These elements will allow the construction of fairer and more egalitarian societies, with better conditions to face present and future challenges. In this sense, the report on the Regional Alliance for the Digitalization of Women will be very useful to know what we need to strengthen to close the technological gap.

As I expressed during the launch of the report Towards the Construction of Integrated Care Systems in Latin America and the Caribbean, prepared with ECLAC, and in line with the theme of the XV Regional Conference on Women, I believe it is essential to emphasize that the creation of integrated care systems can become a key driver of socioeconomic recovery in the region, leaving no one behind.

In this regard, I would like to highlight the relevance of the Global Alliance for Care, a global initiative launched by the National Institute of Women of Mexico in alliance with UN Women to address the burden of care that hinders women's economic opportunities.

As Alicia Bárcena has already expressed, these two days are very important because they include the Regional Consultation prior to the CSW66, which will take place in New York, March 14-25, 2022, with the priority theme: "Achieving gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls in the context of

climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes."

Unfortunately, we already know from our own experience that Latin America and the Caribbean is a region particularly vulnerable to climate change and disasters. Increasingly intense and frequent climate-related phenomena are, to a large extent, caused by human activity.

In recent years, we have seen this with the droughts, floods, and hurricanes that have had a more severe impact in this region.

In this context, we know that women are disproportionately affected by climate change, environmental degradation, and disasters, especially those in a situation of greater vulnerability. Women and girls have higher levels of mortality and morbidity in disaster situations due to causes that are directly linked to gender inequality.

Thanks to the sustained commitment of the Ministers and authorities of the mechanisms for the advancement of women, in recent years, the region has been able to maintain consultation processes prior to the CSW that have made it possible to reach consensus in preparation for the global meeting that takes place every year in March at the United Nations headquarters. In this regard, Latin America and the Caribbean have been consolidating a steadfast defense of advances for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in all their diversity.

That is why I would like to call on all the Ministers and authorities of the mechanisms for the advancement of women present here today, as on previous occasions, to have the foresight and political vision to adopt a regional Declaration that will serve as an inspiration for the Agreed Conclusions of CSW66 to consider the importance of fully incorporating gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

I mentioned earlier that this was the last Meeting of the Presiding Officers with our dear Alicia Bárcena as Executive Secretary of ECLAC. I cannot help but confess the disappointment I feel and that we at UN Women are all feeling with your departure.



Thank you for your leadership, Alicia. Without your commitment, we would not have such a solid Regional Gender Agenda to address the structural knots that undermine women's rights and autonomy, and we would not have gender areas in ECLAC; we would not have a gender mainstreaming mechanism.

Thanks to you, we were able to confront socioeconomic inequality and poverty; patriarchal, discriminatory, and violent cultural patterns and the culture of privilege; the sexual division of labor and the unjust social organization of care; and the concentration of power and hierarchical relations in the public sphere.

During the crisis brought about by COVID-19, I would like to highlight your way of reacting quickly to emphasize the importance of putting women at the center of recovery. I salute your power to transform our societies, which is fundamental.

Your commitment to ensuring that gender equality and women's empowerment is at the core of ECLAC's work is recognized both by national authorities and civil society, as well as by your colleagues in the UN System. We hope this commitment will continue and be strengthened in the next administration.

Dear Alicia, with all the affection that you know I have for you, I am incredibly grateful for the generosity you have opened ECLAC to work with UN Women, with the common goal of a more just and egalitarian region for women and girls. I wish you much success in your new endeavors, and I am sure that, wherever you are, you will be an ally for gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Dear Alicia, I would like to end my speech with the words of the Uruguayan Eduardo Galeano in *The Book of Embraces*: "In the end, we are what we do to change what we are."

Thank you very much, and I hope we have a very productive Meeting of the Presiding Officers.