

Side Event: SIDS for SIDS Collaboration
27th Floor, Secretariat Building, Room 23
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Statement by Alicia Bárcena, Executive Secretary of ECLAC

(Delivered by Romain Zivy, Office of the Executive Secretary)

I wish to thank DESA and the Permanent Mission on Singapore for inviting me and the Regional Commissions to this Special Lunch on SIDS for SIDS collaboration.

Thank you so much for this opportunity to showcase the support that we, the Regional Commissions, are providing at the regional and subregional levels in support to Small Island Developing States in the implementation, follow-up and review of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean is the main regional think-tank and knowledge hub on sustainable development and the inter-governmental institution to promote policy dialogue and advocacy in this respect in the LAC region. At its core, lies the mandate to integrating the economic, social and environmental perspectives, into its development work.

As you know, ECLAC, through its Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean based in Port of Spain is specifically dedicated to supporting the development efforts of the Caribbean SIDS. The office covers 26 countries in its programme of work; 13 CARICOM Member States, and 13 territories described as Associate Member Countries.

As you are all aware, the Regional Commissions are a very important part of the institutional architecture of Agenda 2030, and Member States have enhanced this role by requesting to support them in the implementation, follow up and review of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs at the regional and subregional levels. So we are indeed the bridge between the national efforts being undertaken by individual countries at the national level, and the global review of SDG implementation.

Countries have approved the establishment of the Forum of Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development, which held its first meeting in Mexico City on 26-28 April 2017. This annual forum is the regional multi-stakeholder platform to promote peer learning and exchange of experience for the follow up and review of the 2030 Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda to make a regional contribution to the HLPF. ECLAC serves as the Secretariat of the Forum and in this capacity prepares a comprehensive regional report each year for submission to the HLPF in which it analyzes, jointly with the UN system, the initiatives and progress made by member states in terms of:

- Promoting regional and sub-regional peer learning and South-South cooperation on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda National inter-institutional arrangements and inter-sectoral architectures for the follow-up and review of the 2030 agenda
- Identifying data and statistics opportunities, challenges and capacity-building requirements for the measurement of SDGs

- The policy challenges regarding the means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The Forum of countries of Latin America and the Caribbean serves as the key mechanism in our region to facilitate the peer review process that has been built into the Agenda 2030 development framework. It is therefore through this Forum that the challenges, experiences and lessons learned by Member States in the elaboration of their Voluntary National Reviews will be shared and discussed among peers of the region, before they are submitted to the HLPF for review at the global level.

The regional Forum is also a space for interactive and frank peer learning and exchange of experience, with particular emphasis on countries who present their VNRs at the HLPF. Belize was the first Caribbean state to sign up to present its VNR in the HLPF. Also, The Bahamas and Jamaica will submit VNRs to the HLPF next year, in 2018. And I would like to use this platform to encourage other Caribbean states to consider joining them, if not for next year, than consider the year after that; it is not too early to being planning for 2019. The VNR process is very useful for stocktaking; for the sharing of best practice; for seeking support in the search for solutions to the challenges faced in SDG implementation which may be identified.

Now I would like to mention here that ECLAC, in collaboration with CARICOM and the SIDS Unit in DESA, has also been integrally involved in supporting the Caribbean's participation in the SIDS sustainable development agenda; in fact we

prepared the Caribbean Synthesis report for SAMOA that assessed the progress made by the subregion in advancing the SIDS agenda.

An important conclusion that we discerned from that assessment was the fact that the Caribbean in the previous decade had given much more attention to implementation of the **Millennium Development Goals** than it had to implementing the SIDS agenda. For this reason, since the launch of Agenda 2030 in September 2015, ECLAC has been strongly advocating the synergising of the mandates of the SAMOA Pathway with the SDGs, so that the Caribbean states focus on integrating **both** development platforms into national development planning.

We therefore convened the **Caribbean symposium on mainstreaming the SDGs into national development planning** in Kingston, Jamaica in February this year to give member states an early opportunity to consider how best to integrate the SDGs and SAMOA Pathway in national development plans. Twenty-two Caribbean countries participated. They identified gaps in institutional frameworks and national capacity that undermine their ability to implement comprehensive, integrated development plans. There is need for strong institutional infrastructure at the national level to provide coherent, integrated leadership for the sustainable development process. We are concerned that many countries are still to identify and designate this leading institution, and this is contributing to the slow rate of SDG implementation in the Caribbean. We are therefore continuing the work started in the symposium, most recently at a **workshop to accelerate SDG implementation in the Caribbean** in Port of Spain in May.

In collaboration with UNDP, we have also been playing an active role in the **UNDG Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support (MAPS)** missions that have so far been undertaken in the Caribbean. Indeed, on these missions, ECLAC has assumed responsibility for the assessment of national data needs and the statistical capacity of countries to monitor and report on the SDGs.

Our focus on strengthening the statistical capacity of the Caribbean states is also directly linked to our role as Secretariat of the Forum, with overarching responsibility for the monitoring and measurement of SDG implementation in Latin America and the Caribbean. We fully understand the data challenge that will accompany the SDG review process. This is why, in our first annual report on SDG progress at the regional level, we underscored the importance of strengthened national statistical systems to implement the global SDG indicator framework.

Of course, the challenge facing Caribbean states in the area of data collection and statistical analysis is very well known. Planning, monitoring and measuring SDG implementation will make significant demands on data producers, particularly where the range and frequency of such statistics is concerned. Providing support for building capacity for data collection and for strong evidence based decision-making will therefore continue to be a priority for ECLAC.

In this regard, ECLAC has again been working in partnership with the CARICOM Secretariat and the DESA SIDS Unit to define a core set of SDG indicators that

reflect the key development priorities distilled from the SDG framework and the SAMOA platform. In December last year we hosted in Port of Spain a workshop organized jointly with the SIDS Unit and CARICOM. This workshop produced the initial draft set of core indicators for the Caribbean that is currently being reviewed by the CARICOM Secretariat. The outcome of this process will provide a useful starting point for a similar process that the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC plans to implement for Latin America and the Caribbean as a whole.

I am also very pleased to let you know that we are currently implementing a project on “**Planning for the implementation of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development in Latin America and the Caribbean,**” with support from the GIZ. Through this project, ECLAC will provide six Caribbean SIDS with assistance to strengthen the institutional and technical capacity of their National Statistical Systems to produce data in support of evidence-based policy planning. We hope to provide support to a further six Caribbean SIDS with resources from the 11th tranche of the Development Account. We expect this project to begin next year.

Regarding means of implementation and the crucial area of financing for development, in the case of SIDS, the debt to GDP ratio for a number of Caribbean countries from 2012 to 2016 is a cause of great concern. For the Caribbean as a whole in 2016 the debt burden was 70.7 percent. And when one examines the individual experiences as many as eleven Caribbean countries have debt burdens between 62 and 124 percent of GDP. With regard to climate change, the ECLAC senior authority asserted that the small island States of the

Caribbean are more susceptible than other continental areas to the severe consequences related to increasing sea levels and natural disasters. She pointed out that in the past 40 years, it is estimated that such disasters have cost nearly 5% of the sub-region's GDP. For this reason, ECLAC has launched a debt-relief proposal for the English-speaking Caribbean through the creation of a prevention fund for mitigating the consequences of climate change in their economies. Proposals such as the one by ECLAC to establish a prevention fund to stimulate "green" investments and shore up competition and productivity in the Caribbean will deliver much needed diversification as a means for reducing economic vulnerability, and will spur economic growth by putting the Caribbean on a sustainable path to achieving the SDGs.

These are some examples of what ECLAC is doing to support regional and sub regional processes linked associated with the review and follow up of the 2030 Agenda in the Caribbean. ECLAC's contribution is intended to be structural; institutional and focused on measurement. For Agenda 2030 tasks governments with the responsibility of ensuring the monitoring and evaluation of progress. These elements we have identified as the Achilles heel of the subregion.

We are committed to working with the Caribbean to address these challenges. It would be wonderful if opportunities for collaboration with the other Regional Commissions could be explored, for we know that many of the challenges faced by SIDS are linked to limitations of size and capacity, and so are common to all. Let us see how we work more closely and collaboratively going forward.