

Remarks by Ms. Alicia Bárcena, Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) at the 12th meeting of the operational activities for development segment of the Economic and Social Council

Interactive panel discussion on “Improving the governance and coordination of the United Nations development system”

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Distinguished Vice-President of ECOSOC, querido Embajador Barros de Chile, the country that the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) has the honour to be hosted in for close to 70 years,

Distinguished Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations and my dear friend Amina Mohammed, to whom I extend a warm welcome back to her second home: the United Nations,

Distinguished representatives of Member States, ‘

Colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to represent the five regional commissions of the United Nations –the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), and ECLAC– on this panel discussing how to improve the governance and coordination of the United Nations development system, which is undoubtedly a crucial and urgent issue.

The Secretary-General of the United Nations has made reform of the United Nations development system an immediate priority in his first months in office, a reform that the Member States have been calling for to provide them with better support to implement the transformative 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Time is flying by and we are already in the second year of the calendar set to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

In this regard, the quadrennial comprehensive policy review (QCPR) and the operational activities for development segment convened this week by the Economic and Social Council are of the utmost importance as the Secretary-General’s upcoming report on the implementation of QCPR will lay the foundations for the reform of the United Nations development system.

As our Secretary-General has stated repeatedly, achieving sustainable development is not only an ethical principle that should seek to eradicate extreme poverty and attain the 17 SDGs by 2030, but it is also one of the master keys to addressing the root causes of other challenges that the United Nations was created to tackle: peace and security, conflict prevention, human rights.

Achieving the objectives of an equality-centred agenda by 2030 will require a fundamental change in the prevailing style of development of our Member States, and of production and consumption patterns.

According to the regional commissions, the questions to be addressed as a matter of priority are: What are the key policy challenges of implementing the Agenda in today's complex and ever-changing world? What are the implications of the notion and objectives of a new, universal development agenda centred on sustainable development that is inclusive of least developed countries (LDCs), middle-income countries (MICs), small island developing States (SIDS) and industrialized countries?

We are facing tectonic and epochal changes: the role of China; climate change; financialization rather than investment in the real economy; the fourth industrial revolution; new technological paradigms, such as artificial intelligence and digital and big data revolutions; demographic shifts; and waves of migration. All these issues have particular consequences and imply different policy trade-offs in our various regions, subregions and countries.

In order to make good on the promises that the 2030 Agenda embodies, we have to foster a new paradigm aligned with progressive structural change, one where public institutions and policies focus on an environmental big push geared towards transforming the production structure and strengthening the absorption of technical progress, fostering sustainability and equality.

Progressive structural change is not the result of spontaneous market forces: it demands industrial policies to stimulate dynamic sectors that have Keynesian and Schumpeterian efficiencies and follow low-carbon paths with forward and backward linkages, so as to pull along the entire economy as they grow.

In addition, the 2030 Agenda is being implemented in a more complex economic and political context: an economic downturn with global growth below 3%; slowing trade; excess liquidity and weak aggregate demand; the economic slowdown in China; the change in economic and trade policies in the United States; financial assets growing faster than investment in the real economy. All this is shaping a protectionist and possibly recessionary trend that lacks a coordinated approach to expand world output and restructure production.

We believe it is time to rethink global governance in order to move towards a new form of a collective Keynesianism, but this time around it should be characterized by a global environmental/sustainable development Keynesianism. The world needs an environmental big push that prizes the quality of economic growth, investment, infrastructure, industrialization and structural productive change.

We need a new coalition at the global, regional and national level between the State (governments), the market (the private sector) and civil society to move from business as usual to a new style of development.

This will form the basis for boosting high-quality employment and productivity in a manner that will make it possible to sustainably craft more and better social policies; although, there is no single model for giving effect to this vision, as it requires transformations that depend on the specific features of each country and region.

As Member States have stressed in the 2030 Agenda, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the Paris Agreement, “business as usual” is no longer possible under our current development patterns. Similarly, the regional commissions believe that business as usual is no longer possible for the United Nations system if we want to stay relevant as an institution.

In the light of the interconnected nature of the challenges that the world faces, the United Nations system must not only be more agile and work more effectively together, it must also function and deliver in an integrated and coherent manner.

Enhancing the vertical nexuses between the national, regional and global levels will be critical to repositioning the United Nations development system to deliver effectively on the 2030 Agenda. The regional commissions are the key link in that chain.

To meet the challenges and tap into opportunities, the United Nations development system must leverage its assets better and engage at the regional level. In that regard, its most valuable assets are the United Nations regional commissions.

According to regional commissions, putting the 2030 Agenda into effect will require action on three fronts:

- international and regional governance for the production of public goods;
- regional cooperation and input for global discussions; and

- national policies, in particular macroeconomic, social, industrial and environmental policies.

We would submit that subregional and regional entities are better positioned to deliver in these critical areas. The functional structures of the regional commissions are well suited to providing countries with a "one-stop shop" for policy advice that facilitates integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development. Our institutional architecture is intergovernmental and intersectoral in nature.

Similarly to the other regional commissions, ECLAC is the technical secretariat for bodies such as the Statistical Conference of the Americas, the Regional Council for Planning, the Regional Conference on Women, which we convene in conjunction with UN-Women, the Regional Conference on Population and Development, convened in conjunction with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the Regional Conference on Social Development, convened jointly with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

All these bodies, which differ slightly in each region but have a shared vision, are supported by the Regional Coordination Mechanisms (RCMs) established by the Council. The RCMs, chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General and convened by the regional commissions, bring together all the United Nations funds, programmes and specialized agencies.

Regional entities can leverage capacity in support of countries' demands more effectively and efficiently, as well as forge consensus in the regions and bring regional voices to the global table in critical negotiations and decision-making. At the regional commissions, we see the value and impact of this power constantly at our ministerial sessions, in our intergovernmental machinery and in our various inclusive and universal forums and platforms that bring together not only Member States at the highest level, but also our regional and subregional partner organizations, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders.

The regional commissions have an important role to play in this context by bringing a regional dimension to discussions on certain macroissues, such as addressing inequality, new ways of measuring progress in poverty reduction and financing for development, and by fostering an exchange of knowledge and experience among regions.

There are nine key focus areas where regional commissions can effectively contribute to a system-wide effort to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda:

1. Ensuring integration and promoting intersectoral coordination through institutional arrangements, by leveraging multidisciplinary synergies and enhancing policy coherence.

2. Integrating the Sustainable Development Goals into national planning, budgeting and fiscal frameworks, by promoting policy and institutional coherence, consistency and coordination.
3. Enhancing the data collection and analysis and statistical capacities of Member States in order to develop effective approaches to measuring progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including building coordinated approaches with the private sector to integrate big data.
4. Adapting and aligning Member States' development strategies, particularly those of small island developing States, LDCs and MICs, with national and regional contexts.
5. Identifying and promoting alternative and innovative sources of financing for implementing the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement.
6. Leveraging science, technology and innovation in support of an "environmental big push" to establish a new form of industrialization.
7. Tapping South-South and regional partnerships.
8. Forging partnerships for the provision of global public goods (climate security, financial stability, control of pandemics, peace and security, among others).
9. Engaging diverse stakeholders, thematic and regional coalitions in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

A concrete example of this is the establishment of the Regional Implementation Forums on Sustainable Development, convened under the auspices of the regional commissions, which will provide regional inputs to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly.

These Regional Forums will serve as peer-learning platforms on the implementation of agendas, facilitate the exchange of experiences and promote coordination and coherence within the United Nations development system. Other relevant regional and subregional bodies and international financial institutions will be invited to participate in the Forums, such as the African Union, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and development banks, such as the African Development Bank (ADB) or the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), to provide inputs for the regional annual progress reports on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as other follow-up and review mechanisms.

The Forums will contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda by promoting South-South and triangular cooperation between regions or different country groupings, the data revolution/statistics, the interface between science and policy, domestic resource mobilization, tax cooperation as mandated, and technology and innovation.

Through the Forums, the regional commissions aim to facilitate Member States' deliberations to find common positions on regional road maps for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals, establish peer review mechanisms, exchange experiences and examine opportunities to strengthen institutional frameworks for the coordinated implementation of the Goals.

To supplement and reinforce the Regional Forums, the regional commissions, as mandated, will also convene financing forums and workshops to harness alternative sources of financing and meetings on science, technology and innovation, and will bring together the United Nations specialized agencies, funds and programmes as well as non-United Nations regional and subregional entities.

Collaborative initiatives and a number of formal partnerships are already underway for the regional commissions to work with other United Nations specialized agencies, funds and programmes, and the aforementioned regional and subregional organizations.

To make the renewed vision and transformational shifts called for by the 2030 Agenda a reality, Member States have repeatedly said that the United Nations development system must be fit for purpose, improve its working methods, rethink its functioning and deliver as one. In this regard, the Council's dialogue on the longer-term positioning of the United Nations development system in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has concluded that a profound change in mindset regarding development is needed and that institutional frameworks, including operational and knowledge-based systems, must be modified to ensure greater coherence, efficiency and interlinkages to help intergovernmental entities and Member States to move ahead in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

At the regional level this is primarily carried out through the RCMs, which were established by the Council pursuant to its resolution 1998/46 to foster inter-agency work and synergies. The United Nations Development Group (UNDG), chaired by the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), is a more recent inter-agency mechanism created by the Secretary-General to ensure coherence at the global level. At the national level, it has also been tasked with providing technical backstopping to the United Nations country teams. There is an urgent need to clarify the roles of the regional UNDGs and RCMs and identify much-needed complementarities. The development pillar of the United Nations needs both mechanisms and synergies can be found. The RCMs bring together entities from the United Nations system at the regional level, including the regional commissions, UNDG and key non-United Nations partners. However, in recent years tensions and competition have arisen between the RCMs and regional UNDGs.

We share the conclusions of the Independent Team of Advisers regarding their proposal that the oversight and leadership of the United Nations development pillar, including its operational activities for development, should be rooted in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General or the Office of the Deputy Secretary-General to ensure impartiality and greater coherence among United Nations specialized agencies, funds and programmes and departments of the Secretariat.

I hope the Council and Member States can dwell more on some of these reflections as you move forward with your deliberations on the upcoming quadrennial comprehensive policy review and the longer-term positioning of the United Nations development system in the context of implementation of the 2030 Agenda.