

**THE DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**REMARKS AT THE SEVENTH MEETING OF THE FORUM OF  
THE COUNTRIES OF LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN  
ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT 2024**

**16 APRIL 2024**

**H.E Ms. Laura Fernández Delgado, Minister of National Planning and Economic Policy of Costa Rica, and Vice-Chair of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development**

**My colleague Mr. José Manuel Salazar-Xirinachs, Executive Secretary of ECLAC.**

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen**

**It is always a pleasure to be in this region – where the sustainable development agenda was born.**

**Seven years into the 2030 Agenda, the leadership of Latin America and the Caribbean on sustainable development remains remarkable, in spite of a challenging global context.**

**Many of you have been instrumental in renewing commitments and stepping up action on the 2030 Agenda.**

**I think of Trinidad and Tobago, with the presidency of the United Nations General Assembly and Chile, at the helm of the Economic and Social Council respectively.**

**I think of Antigua and Barbuda, hosting the Small Island Development States Conference in May,**

**I think of Colombia hosting the United Nations Conference on Biodiversity in October.**

**I think of Brazil's ambitious presidency of the G20 and upcoming Presidency of the COP30 climate conference.**

**Colombia, Brazil and Chile are also working together to establish the Regional Tax Cooperation Platform for Latin America and the Caribbean – enabling tax policies to maximize their contribution to spurring sustainable development.**

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**Such energy and leadership are in dire need in today's world.**

**Global geopolitical tensions are rising, conflicts are raging, and inequalities are rife.**

**And many economies are being suffocated by debt, amidst a cost-of-living crisis and the ongoing economic effects of COVID-19.**

**Many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean are being hit particularly hard.**

**Public debt levels in the region have reached the highest level since 2000.**

**And sustainable development is suffering.**

**In 2023, extreme poverty in the region had increased almost three percentage points compared to 2015.**

**Moderate or severe food insecurity rose to nearly thirty percent in 2022, mainly affecting women and rural areas.**

**And fossil fuels continue to be the primary energy source across the region as a whole, even if many around the table are clean energy champions.**

**All in all, Latin America and the Caribbean is on track to meet just 22% of the SDG targets.**

**This situation is not unique to this region. Across the world, the Sustainable Development Goals are way off track.**

**But there is hope.**

**At the SDG Summit last September, governments endorsed a bold Political Declaration.**

**It renews the world's commitment to drive transformative change to deliver on the promise of the 2030 Agenda.**

**It also commits to advancing the Secretary-General's proposal for an SDG Stimulus of \$500 billion a year.**

**It lays down a pathway for action on debt, so that resources are freed for investments in sustainable development.**

**But the Declaration was only the first step.**

**It must be followed by concrete, ambitious and transformative action that will put countries on the path to deliver on their climate and SDG commitments by 2030 and beyond.**

**In this regard, it is essential that we zero in on key transitions and investment pathways that can drive progress across the goals -- including sustainable food systems, energy and climate action, education, digitalization, jobs and social protection.**

**There are significant opportunities here across Latin America and the Caribbean.**

**And in many of these areas, you are already demonstrating how a long-term vision can drive these transitions.**

**Allow me to highlight four areas in particular.**

**First, coupling climate action with delivering a just and sustainable energy transition.**

**While the region has achieved close to universal energy access, many disparities remain.**

**Up to 15 percent of rural populations still lack electricity access. And two-thirds of the region's energy supply still comes from fossil fuels.**

**The world's capacity to generate renewable electricity is expanding faster than at any time in the last three decades - giving us a real chance of achieving the goal of tripling global renewables capacity by 2030.**

**And close to a third of energy supply comes from renewable sources, though we are witnessing rapid growth in solar and wind, as well as in green hydrogen development.**

**In 2020, financing for climate action in the region amounted to 0,5% of regional GDP, far below the estimations that close to 5% is required to reach regional commitments.**

**With the right investments, we can achieve the SDGs and deliver an inclusive energy transition at the same time. In fact, these two go hand in hand. There is no dichotomy.**

**The next round of Nationally Determined Contributions, or NDCs, which all governments must submit ahead of COP30 in Brazil, is a huge opportunity for countries to do just that.**

**If done right, these plans can double as transition and investment plans – clearly defining national transition pathways and investment needs, and setting economy-wide, absolute emission reduction targets covering all greenhouse gases.**

**We count on this region to continue to lead by example.**

**Second, addressing inequalities through food system transformation**

**Transforming our food systems is an effective way of tackling vulnerability and income disparities.**

**Latin America and the Caribbean play a vital role in producing food that benefits not only the region but the entire planet.**

**This region is the world's largest net food exporter, and many economies rely on food exports. Yet, it has the highest cost of a healthy diet compared to all other regions.**

**Taking an integrated approach towards food systems transformation could enhance the performance of the agricultural sector and address structural income disparities.**

**Positive examples are already underway - such as Uruguay's Roadmap for Food Systems Transformation, Brazil's ABC+ Plan for Low Carbon agriculture, Costa Rica's Bioeconomy strategy, and Colombia's National Plan for irrigation and draining in the rural economy.**

**And at the regional level - CELAC Plan for Food Security and Nutrition and the Eradication of Hunger by 2030.**

**Countries in the region are also updating the National Pathways developed in follow-up of the Food Systems Summit to respond to evolving contexts.**

**Third, transforming education to secure a better future.**

**As we look ahead to this year's Transforming Education Summit Stock-take and related meetings, we see several critical areas for action.**

**While most countries in this region have nearly achieved universal primary education, there is still some way to go on secondary and post-secondary education where progress has stalled.**

**Now is also the time to seize the opportunities presented by digitalization and to ensure that teachers are supported, empowered and equipped for these and other major shifts.**

**As the world of work changes, it's essential that education systems be geared to equip students with the values, skills and knowledge needed today. This includes basic digital literacy and the skills to thrive in a digital economy, from financial services to e-commerce.**

**And with all of this comes the need for more not less investment in education. Public spending on education per student in the Latin America and the Caribbean region remains very low compared to more developed economies. Spending constraints, whether domestic or international, must be tackled.**

#### **Fourth, digital connectivity.**

**Digitalization can drive new economic opportunities, build resilience and reduce poverty.**



**But today, too often, it reinforces inequalities.**

**Broadband reaches less than twenty percent of people in Latin America and the Caribbean. A third of people do not use the internet at all.**

**This region urgently needs investment in digital public infrastructure and the expansion of digital connectivity.**

**Also here we see positive examples – from the creation of a Ministry of Digital Transformation in Trinidad and Tobago and Chile's Integrated Platform of Electronic Services and Digital Talent program to Costa Rica's National Telecommunications Development Plan.**

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**In all this, the UN development system is your trusted partner.**

**We stand ready to help you strengthen institutions, governance and rebuild trust in democracy in a region that is seeing huge polarization. A conducive environment is essential to advance these complex transitions. This will also require sophisticated expertise to shape policy and regulatory frameworks, harness investment, and secure support from multilateral and regional development banks, as well as private investments.**

**Our Resident Coordinators, UN Country Teams and regional capacities are here to accompany you on your journey.**

**And we count on Member States to keep investing in the UN development system – including the Resident Coordinator system– to ensure we can continue to do so.**

**At this and the next session, we also want to continue to harvest the ideas and input as we reform the global governance of the future.**

**The Summit of the Future in September is an important opportunity to strengthen the role of global cooperation in supporting sustainable development, peace and human rights for all.**

**The voice of your region is crucial for shaping a successful outcome of the Summit of the Future that will accelerate the SDGs.**

**And as we look ahead to 2025, for the roadmap towards the 4<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Financing for Development and the second World Summit on Social Development.**

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**Governments, stakeholders and other constituencies, let us together seize the opportunities ahead, and build a healthy,**

**peaceful and prosperous future – for Latin America, the Caribbean and beyond.**

**Thank you.**