

Remarks by José Manuel Salazar-Xirinachs at event:

A key to achieving SDGs: Rights holders' meaningful engagement and strengthening regional processes in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda

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First of all congratulations all of you for being here in this important event.

I hope that our conversation will contribute to the current debate on the acceleration of the SDGs and the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

I would like to highlight the engagement of the representatives of the Civil Society Participation Mechanisms of Africa, Asia Pacific and Europe, as well as that of the representatives of the governments of Norway and Nepal (TBC), together with my colleagues from ESCAP and ECE. Our presence here is an example of the importance of the multi-actor and multi-level implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

I would also like to extend my sincere appreciation and admiration to **Mabel Bianco** for her long career and years of dedicated work in general, and specifically with us at ECLAC in coordinating the Civil Society Participation Mechanism. Her efforts have significantly contributed to the success of many meetings of our Regional Forum. Muchísimas gracias Mabel!

I think we all agree that governments cannot achieve the Sustainable Development Goals alone. As stated in most of the Voluntary National Reviews submitted by Latin American and Caribbean countries to the High-Level Political Forum, all relevant stakeholders, particularly civil society organizations, must join in and participate in the process.

However, it is important to acknowledge that the engagement of civil society organizations in the work of the UN has always been a complex matter. The dichotomy between the willingness of the Member States to allow participation and their desire to keep it under control presents a significant challenge for the UN and its various intergovernmental processes.

The relationship between the UN and civil society, in essence, concerns “meaningful participation”. Handled well, it enhances the quality of decision-making, increases ownership of the decisions, improves accountability and transparency of the process and enriches outcomes through various perspectives and experiences. But - mishandled - it can hamper the inter-governmental search for common ground, over-crowd agendas and generate unnecessary conflicts at relevant decision-making processes.

Through the institutionalization of the 2030 Agenda at the national, regional and global levels the United Nations has given increasing

importance to participatory approaches to decision-making and multi-stakeholder dialogues and debates for developing political agreements; recognizing that they encourage a positive dynamic between citizens and their governments.

Meaningful participation throughout the decision-making cycle makes societies safer and more resilient and public policy processes more legitimate and effective.

Civil Society organizations have enhanced public understanding of the SDGs, sharpened policymaking, encouraged more concerted international efforts to tackle "global public goods", and reduced the gap between governments' action and policy rhetoric. Most member states and UN officials see these as positive contributions and therefore welcome "meaningful participation". The benefits of participation appear to outweigh significantly any counterargument.

In this context, ECLAC has been intensifying its efforts towards the development of institutional strategies aimed at promoting and strengthening the active participation of civil society in all its intergovernmental bodies. For us this represents both an opportunity and a challenge: the opportunity to identify and integrate new capabilities and diverse experiences and the challenge of preserving the

identity of intergovernmental work, while remaining willing to collaborate closely with new actors.

We have learned that civil society participation works best in the long term if it is organized as a continuous and progressive process rather than carried out on an ad hoc basis or through isolated participation exercises. Permanent institutional arrangements strengthen the capacities of civil society representatives and promote relationships of trust, support and collaboration between all the stakeholders involved in the process.

Furthermore, institutionalized participation allows different actors to dialogue, exchange knowledge and experiences, plan actions and make timely contributions to decision-making processes. The work of the civil society participation mechanism is a clear example of this.

The Regional Forum has offered a valuable space for articulation, dialogue and advocacy of Civil Society Organizations, which has strengthened interlinkages between different interest groups and representatives of the government and the United Nations system, through a series of formal and informal instances, such as:

- i. the Latin American and Caribbean Civil Society Meeting, organized ahead of the meetings of the Regional Forum,

- ii. the participation of civil society panelists in the different plenary sessions and
- iii. the declaration of the civil society organizations.

On the other hand, the convergence of interests of multiple actors and the concurrence of different thematic agendas constitutes one of the most complex challenges for the stakeholder organizations and networks. Acknowledging their heterogeneous nature and the complexity of their multiple thematic agendas, the civil society organizations of the region have decided to express themselves as a unitary actor through the mechanism, seeking to achieve a common goal and a series of shared objectives.

This demands an operational framework capable of ensuring the institutionalization of dialogue, both within the mechanism and with government representatives, the United Nations system and other relevant stakeholders. This framework coincides with a deliberative conception of participation, characterized by “multiple channels of consultation, convergence and agreement” that, in turn, allow for effectively addressing conflicts and disagreements.

Faced with the complex challenges posed by participatory governance, our Regional Forum, together with its civil society participation mechanism, occupies a unique position in the region to articulate joint

efforts, facilitate dialogue and promote the construction of partnerships between governments and relevant stakeholders for the achievement of the SDGs.

Some factors that have contributed to the success of the participatory process include:

- Seeing participation as an enhancement of the inter-governmental process
- Emphasizing both informal and formal interaction for learning and trust-building
- Strengthening responsiveness to the inputs of civil society
- Acknowledging the diversity of civil society, leaving no one behind
- Working with and respecting self-organized mechanisms of civil society
- Allocating human and financial resources to enhance participation
- Encouraging staff and leadership to interact with civil society directly and listen thoughtfully to their ideas, experiences and constructive criticism
- Developing strong links with constituency and issue-based networks
- Encouraging civil society to speak collectively rather than individually.

Thus, throughout the different meetings of the Regional Forum, in their statements, civil society organizations and government representatives have recognized that only through integrated cooperation between multiple stakeholders it will be possible to address the complex challenges that the region faces to achieve the SDGs.

Medium and long-term solutions must emerge from a participatory and multi-level governance structure, global, regional, national and local, based on dialogue between multiple actors, in which organized civil society has a fundamental role to play.

Thank you.