

Statement by José Manuel Salazar-Xirinachs
Executive Secretary of ECLAC
at the
Thirtieth Session of the Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee
Port of Spain, 11 September 2024

Distinguished representatives

It is my distinct pleasure to welcome you to the thirtieth session of the Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee.

It is for me a special occasion since this is the first time that I have participated in-person in a session of this Committee since assuming the office of Executive Secretary of the Commission.

It is also a special occasion because Trinidad and Tobago, the country which hosts the ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean here in Port of Spain, today assumes the Chair of the CDCC for the next two years.

It is therefore a very important opportunity for me and my entire team here in Port of Spain to say thank you to the government and people of Trinidad and Tobago for their hospitality, accommodation and unstinting support through the years.

I extend special words of appreciation to Minister Penelope Beckles-Robinson for her stewardship as principal interlocutor for our office, and I warmly congratulate you, Minister, on your assumption to the Chair of this thirtieth session of the CDCC.

The ECLAC Subregional Headquarters here in Port of Spain serves as the Secretariat for the CDCC and I can assure you that my team looks forward to supporting you as Chair during your tenure. I am told that you are known as one of the hardest working members of Parliament, so the challenge will be for us to keep up with you!

I also take this opportunity to thank Minister Albert Ramdin, outgoing Chair of the CDCC, my friend and colleague of many years, for his dynamic and insightful leadership of the Committee these past two years.

My thanks, too, to the other members of the Bureau who served with him; I acknowledge in this regard Premier Farrell of Montserrat, outgoing Rapporteur of the Committee. While financial constraints prevented more frequent strategic meetings and initiatives of the Bureau, we appreciated the members using their voice to advance the cause and interests of the countries of the Caribbean in various forums, most recently at the SIDS4 Conference in May.

This thirtieth meeting offers a rich opportunity for the Committee to celebrate its achievements and reflect on the challenges ahead of us as we promote a more collaborative, actionable, and inclusive programme for the sustainable development of the Caribbean. This Committee was the brainchild of two past leaders of your subregion: the late Prime Minister Eric Williams of Trinidad and Tobago and the late President Fidel Castro of Cuba.

As the small islands of the Caribbean emerged as newly independent states and began taking their place as members of the United Nations, these two leaders anticipated the need for a forum within the regional commission, where the unique challenges and particular interests of the small states of the Caribbean could be

nurtured, expressed and strategically shaped to ensure that the identity and voice of the countries of this subregion would not be swallowed up and lost in the wider Latin American space.

CDCC is thus the only subsidiary organ of the Commission established on a geographic rather than thematic premise. Its interests and engagement in the work of the Commission cut across all other Committees.

No doubt some of you have participated in ECLAC subregional meetings on women; population; social development; sustainable development, fiscal issues and others. Meetings that allowed you to shape a Caribbean position in advance of your participation in the wider regional meeting.

Another valuable characteristic of this Committee is the nature of its membership. The Constituent Declaration of the CDCC affords all territories granted Associate Membership status in ECLAC, full membership in the CDCC. There are thirteen Associate Member Countries that have voice as members of this Committee, and I am pleased to see that we have so many of our Associate Members represented here today. It is an important space afforded these territories to sit at the table with their neighbours, to address common challenges and development aspirations.

Such are the simple yet meaningful accomplishments that we celebrate today. This morning, as you reflect on the role the Committee has played over the years in preparing and supporting your subregion to articulate a uniquely Caribbean position in forums of the United Nations, and in strengthening your technical and institutional capacity to pursue national and regional development imperatives, we invite you to consider what we at ECLAC should do better, or do differently, to help

you improve the impact of your advocacy, and to ensure that you take positive, measurable steps towards the achievement of resilient growth and sustainable development.

Certainly, the road ahead is long, and the obligations overwhelming. Progress on implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals is not where it should be. With just over five years to go to culmination of Agenda 2030, the Caribbean has only 20% of its SDG targets on track for achievement; 33% moving in the right direction but too slowly for achievement, and 47% moving in the wrong direction.

Furthermore, slow progress is recorded in sectors critical to your sustainable development like health and wellbeing, quality education and access to fresh water. And then there are those indicators that lack the data for us to properly measure progress at all; indicators on key issues like gender equality and climate action.

In fact, data insufficiency presents a fundamental challenge to the accomplishment of a range of development imperatives: including to apply disaster risk reduction and response measures; and to ensure optimal use of the newly approved Multidimensional Vulnerability Index so that you can effectively make your case for greater access to concessional financing.

The data challenge is one that our Commission has sought to address over the years. We have steadfastly led the effort to alleviate Caribbean data limitations through statistical capacity building. We have also advocated for greater statistical literacy, especially among decision-makers, to promote enlightened evidence-based decision-making across all sectors.

I commend the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago for hosting a Masterclass session on Data and Statistics for Decision Making organized by the ECLAC Port of Spain team earlier this year. It afforded legislators a unique opportunity to gain insights into the administration of official statistics and to improve their statistical literacy.

We have advanced the strengthening of data capacity most effectively and consistently through our support for implementation of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs in the Caribbean, beginning with the first subregional symposium on mainstreaming the SDGs in national development planning, which we organized in Jamaica, in early 2017.

Indeed, support for accelerating SDG implementation has been a key component of the technical cooperation provided by the Commission in recent years, be it through support for the drafting of National Sustainable Development Plans and the structuring of institutional mechanisms for SDG implementation; through assistance with preparation of your Voluntary National Reviews for presentation at the High-level Political Forum in New York, or through country participation in the workshops, training and peer-learning activities regularly held in the context of the annual meeting of the Forum on Sustainable Development held in Santiago every April.

And by no means do we do this work alone. For we are part of the wider UN System active in the Caribbean, with agencies, funds and programmes playing complementary roles in keeping with their respective mandates, to ensure comprehensive response to the sustainable development challenges faced by the

countries of this subregion and delivered through the Multi-Country Sustainable Development Framework for the Caribbean.

I am happy to see Trinidad and Tobago Resident Coordinator Joanna Kazana and members of the UN Country Team present. We will hear from them this afternoon how the UN system will integrate its response to key mandates from the SIDS4 Conference with the ongoing support for SDG implementation in the final sprint to 2030.

This integrated response is part of an important effort to enhance Delivery as One in a more cohesive and dynamic United Nations Development System.

Jointly with UNDP, I serve as Co-Vice Chair of the Regional Collaborative Platform for Latin America and the Caribbean. The RCP-LAC unites all 24 UN entities working on sustainable development in the region. It fosters leadership and accountability towards assuring UN development system goals in the region and amplifies Resident Coordinator and UN country team support at the national level to strengthen implementation of Agenda 2030. I report annually to the Forum on Sustainable Development on the impact of system-wide joint efforts in support of our constituents.

I am therefore very pleased to see such strong solidarity and collaboration among the country teams here in the Caribbean. We will need to work effectively together, as the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS, the formal outcome of SIDS4, makes formidable demands on the UN. We will need to be creative in the sourcing of data from existing reporting mechanisms, if this process is not to become overly burdensome for your own countries to meet.

As current Coordinator of the five regional commissions, I have also used this platform to give voice to the particular concerns of our region, especially in forums preparing for the Summit of the Future, while at the same time promoting cross-regional collaboration. Strengthening South-South and triangular cooperation is another area in which I encourage greater engagement on the part of the Caribbean. It is through such mechanisms that we have facilitated technology and knowledge transfer and joint activities in various fields of cooperation, while strengthening cross-regional solidarity and exchange. There are untapped opportunities to be explored through greater participation in the Regional Conference on South-South Cooperation.

Distinguished representatives,

As we celebrate the achievements of the CDCC at this 30th session, allow me to spotlight a few specific accomplishments of the ECLAC Caribbean office here in Port of Spain.

- ECLAC assisted the Government of Trinidad and Tobago in drafting the Trinidad and Tobago Trade Policy 2019-2023: Towards Sustainable Economic Growth and Diversification (TTTP);
- provided support to Antigua and Barbuda in developing their SDG Communication Strategy and
- assisted the Government of Grenada in the design of a Sustainable Development Institute.
- Currently, ECLAC is assisting Saint Vincent and the Grenadine in the drafting of a Science, Technology, and Innovation for Sustainable Development

strategy and supporting Saint Kitts and Nevis preparation of a National Disability Policy and a Gender Communication Strategy.

- Our work has also induced action at the subregional level with the revision of the CARICOM Statistics Model Bill, prompted by an ECLAC review on statistical legislation in the subregion, and
- the launch of the CARICOM Resilience Fund by the CARICOM Development Fund, which was in no small measure inspired by ECLAC's work on an innovative financing mechanism for the Caribbean.

Excellencies, Distinguished representatives,

I join you today in celebrating this milestone achieved by the CDCC, and in expressing with profound humility, my pride and pleasure at the vital role that this Committee, with the support of our Subregional Headquarters in Port of Spain has played in promoting the visibility and vibrancy of the Caribbean story in the work of our regional commission.

I join you in acknowledging its contribution to the search for solutions to the unique challenges facing this subregion through its commitment to research, development thought and practice over the years; and I celebrate its success in fostering an enduring sense of solidarity, friendship and cooperation between the countries of the Caribbean and those of the wider Latin America.

A well-known saying comes to mind: if you want to go fast, **go alone**; if you want to go far, **go together**. As we prepare to chart a course forward, I encourage you, members of this dynamic Committee, to continue to lean on each other in solidarity and friendship, and to pursue strategic engagement with the countries of

the wider region, so that in the global forums that count, when you argue for a seat at the table; when you make the case for greater access to low-cost finance for heavily indebted, highly vulnerable middle income countries, **then** you can speak unequivocally with one voice.

In the face of multidimensional vulnerability, the common challenges to sustainable development in this subregion cannot be tackled successfully without regional solidarity and advocacy that extends beyond the borders of the Caribbean.

ECLAC remains steadfast in its commitment to pursue innovative solutions to the persistent challenges that confront your countries. For every step you take towards resilient growth and prosperity, we will walk with you.

Thank you.