

**ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**

**STATEMENT DELIVERED BY JOSÉ ANTONIO OCAMPO, EXECUTIVE  
SECRETARY OF THE ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA  
AND THE CARIBBEAN, AT THE OPENING SESSION OF THE REGIONAL  
PREPARATORY CONFERENCE OF LATIN AMERICA AND THE  
CARIBBEAN FOR THE WORLD SUMMIT ON SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT (JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA, 2002)**

**Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 23 October 2001**



UNITED NATIONS



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It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you to this Regional Preparatory Conference of Latin America and the Caribbean for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, which is to take place in Johannesburg, South Africa, in September 2002. I would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to the Government of Brazil and in particular to its President and Ministers for Foreign Affairs, the Environment and Planning, as well as to all those individuals in the Government who have helped organize this event. I would also like to acknowledge the support provided by the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Development Programme, which are co-sponsoring this Conference and which have worked alongside us in carrying out the regional consultative process that is culminating here in Rio de Janeiro. I am also grateful for the presence of the members of the national delegations, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations and the Bureau of the World Summit on Sustainable Development who are with us here today.

Although we have a tradition of holding regional conferences in preparation for world summits, this is the first time that Latin America and the Caribbean have held prior meetings for the purpose of formulating proposals reflecting the unique features of four different subregions: the Southern Cone, the Andean area, the Caribbean and Meso-America. The deliberations that will begin here today represent the culmination of these intensive, highly productive consultations among the Governments and between them and civil society. I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the support which UNEP, UNDP and the Earth Council have provided for this effort.

This Conference has two main objectives. The first is to undertake a 10-year review of the progress made in implementing the agreements reached at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and, in particular, Agenda 21. The second is to identify challenges and new initiatives. The participants will be asked to consider key policy issues, priorities and future follow-up activities that should be included in a Latin American and Caribbean platform of action for sustainable development. To that end, a draft platform for action has been prepared on the basis of a series of consultations among Governments. This draft incorporates both the inputs provided by the subregional meetings and the recommendations made at a working meeting presided over by the Government of Brazil.

To facilitate these deliberations, ECLAC and UNEP have prepared an evaluation of the challenges and opportunities for sustainable development in Latin America and the Caribbean. This document seeks to reflect the wide array of efforts undertaken by the countries of the region and by global and regional organizations committed to the goal of sustainable development. Clearly, financing for sustainable development is one of the central issues and, in conjunction with UNDP and UNEP, ECLAC has therefore organized a panel discussion to address this vital question from a forward-looking perspective. It is hoped that this discussion will give rise to proposals which we can take to the International Conference on Financing for Development to be held in Monterrey, Mexico, in March 2002 and then to the World Summit on Sustainable Development in South Africa.

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I would like to take a moment to take a brief look at how events have unfolded in Latin America and the Caribbean in the decade that has passed since the Earth Summit. In the 1990s, the countries of the region underwent a transformation involving sweeping economic reforms that have made their economies more open to trade, liberalized their national financial markets and foreign capital flows, and given private enterprise a preponderant role in the production of goods and services, as well as a larger part to play in the provision of public services and social benefits. In 1990, production activity began to recover, and many of the inflationary, destabilizing pressures in evidence at the time began to recede, thus allowing the region to emerge from what has become known as the "lost decade". Nonetheless, the region's overall economic growth rate has remained significantly lower than it was in the decades preceding the debt crisis.

On the social front, during the 1990s the Latin American and Caribbean region was marked by a consolidation of the demographic transition, the ageing of its population, insufficient job creation, a reduction in poverty in relative terms, increasing inequality in some countries, progress towards gender equity and greater participation by women in the labour market, an upswing in social investment and the implementation of major reforms in social policies and sectors. An assessment of the situation as a whole shows, however, that the reactivation of economic growth has not translated into comparable progress in the social sphere.

An overall review of events during the decade yields a positive balance in terms of the international climate for sustainable development. Since Rio, there has clearly been a shift towards a new type of international regime which is reflected in a new generation of global environmental conventions and in the formulation of a programme of action to guide the transition towards a sustainable development style. It is also evident that new global ethical principles have been established with a view to laying more equitable foundations for international cooperation. What is more, the concept of sustainable development has become the frame of reference for the international agenda, not only with respect to environmental questions but also for such issues as poverty reduction, gender equity, population and human settlements. Other equally important developments have been the incorporation of new non-State actors, particularly in the

scientific community and the private sector, and the expansion of the role being played by non-governmental organizations and civil society in the search for ways to meet the environmental challenges of sustainable development. It is important to point out, however, that the emergence of new actors does not necessarily eliminate or diminish the role of the State. On the contrary, as a result of these changes, there is a growing awareness of the State's very particular responsibilities with respect to regulation, the articulation of diverse sectors of production, the community and society, and the provision of public goods, including environmental services.

The chief obstacles to the manifestation of this framework of sustainability in concrete activities are institutional and financial in nature. Institutional mechanisms need to be strengthened in order to permit the integration of public policies and the consolidation of clear, consistent regulatory systems together with stable patterns of public expenditure that will help create significant synergies with international finance and private investment.

In the field of international cooperation, the mandates of the various multilateral environmental conventions need to be fully integrated, and progress has to be made in achieving greater transparency and accountability for the results of that cooperation. On the other hand, levels of development assistance have dropped to record lows. In fact, current ODA flows are equivalent to just one third of what the industrialized countries pledged to provide at Stockholm. What is more, assistance for specifically environmental initiatives does not yet amount to even one third as much as the Governments committed themselves to supply at Rio, thereby jeopardizing progress in the implementation of Agenda 21. In addition, a number of disturbing trends persist, such as the tendency to permit concern about global environmental problems to give rise to the introduction of new "conditionalities" for cooperation.

Despite the inroads made at the international level, there are some sectors of society in many countries of the region that continue to view the principles of environmental protection and sustainable development as a hindrance to economic development. Furthermore, the majority of the explicitly environmental policies now in place, as well as the direct and indirect regulatory instruments being used in the region, are reactive in nature. Preventive and promotional policies designed to improve environmental quality while linking it to the competitiveness of production have received much less attention. In addition, environmental institutions' ability to achieve cross-sectoral and subregional policy goals and to provide a solid foundation for the countries' negotiating position in the international arena is at an incipient stage of development. The consequences of this institutional weakness are especially serious when environmental impacts are linked with national and subregional export profiles and economic strategies. The clearest examples of this may be found in emerging issues that are receiving increasing attention in the international debate, such as climate change, biosafety and trade in genetically modified organisms, since the countries of the region are dealing with highly organized transnational agents that are skilled in defending their interests.

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Since the Rio Conference, the hallmark of the international scene has been the consolidation of the globalization process and, in our region, it has been the countries' increasing integration into the global economy. It therefore seems appropriate to recall the words of the Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, when, in his report to the Millennium Summit, he noted that the past decade has shown how millions of people around the planet have been experiencing globalization, not as an agent of progress but rather as a disruptive and even destructive force, while many millions more have been excluded from its benefits altogether. Hence the importance of recognizing that, although it is being driven by technology and by the expansion and integration of markets, globalization is not a "force of nature" but is simply the outcome of processes being carried forward by human beings. This is why it can and should be "domesticated," so that it can be placed at the service of humanity through active international cooperation among sovereign States.

Doing so will entail drawing up a much broader agenda to take the place of the current agenda of globalization and its emphasis on market integration. The fundamental items on this new agenda are the defence of human rights and the promotion of equity in all its many dimensions. This encompasses the elimination of the enormous disparities that mark the international economy, the achievement of gender equity, respect for ethnic and cultural diversity, and the attainment of intergenerational equity, which, in the final analysis, is the foundation for sustainable development.

Almost 10 years after Rio, we have to acknowledge the fact that Latin America and the Caribbean have only recently embarked upon the path to sustainable development and have yet to make sufficient headway in that direction. Thus, the sustainable development agenda's full and effective incorporation is a task that our region has yet to complete. In the last decade we have learned that, given the degree of environmental deterioration to be observed in our countries at intermediate or even early stages of development, sustainability is not a luxury and cannot be postponed. We have also learned that this objective involves much more than simply protecting the wealth of natural resources with which the region is endowed. It entails, in essence, a call for the mobilization of investment in dynamic production sectors that use clean technologies and production processes, sectors that attain competitiveness through capital formation in a broad sense that includes human, social, physical and natural capital. And it is a call to abandon the reactive—indeed negative—response to global demands shown by most of the countries in our region and to establish a proactive, positive agenda in its stead.

The logical counterpart to this effort should be the provision of a greater flow of international cooperation and resources from the industrialized countries in order to fulfil the commitments they themselves have made to the global agenda and, in accordance with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, to finance a portion of the efforts being undertaken in developing countries. The achievements of the past decade in both of these dimensions fall short of what is needed, and the results in respect of cooperation resources have been unsatisfactory.

In terms that are at the very core of our institution's thinking, this all leads to the realization that this process necessarily entails a thorough-going transformation of the prevailing development styles in our region. This, in turn, will require a change in its dominant production and consumption patterns, which lack long-term social, economic and environmental viability. It will also require progress in eliminating poverty and overcoming the striking income differentials and social segmentation that have characterized the region throughout its history. The relationship between these two processes is a profound one. In this respect, I would like to recall the message concerning this question which our host Government conveyed in the report it presented at the Earth Summit in 1992, when it noted that in situations of extreme poverty, individuals who have been marginalized from society and from the nation's economy will feel no commitment to help prevent environmental degradation unless society succeeds in preventing their degradation as human beings.

Mr. President, honourable Ministers, distinguished delegates:

Our region is faced with the twofold challenge of achieving its dynamic integration into today's globalized world while at the same time surmounting the equity gap, the exclusion of sectors of the population and environmental deterioration by shaping a modern vision shared by all members of society. Our region has traditionally exhibited creativity, originality and boldness in its search for ways to meet regional and global challenges. ECLAC sees itself as an active participant in this effort, and I would therefore like to reaffirm our wholehearted commitment to continued collaboration in the urgent task of moving towards sustainable development in our region on the basis of an integral perspective that forges a stronger bond among economic, social and environmental policies.