

Statement delivered by the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Mr. Jose Antonio Ocampo, at the special plenary session on the regional dimension held at the World Summit on Sustainable Development

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The countries of Latin America and the Caribbean engaged in an unprecedented series of national, subregional and regional consultations in preparation for this World Summit on Sustainable Development. The main outcome of that process is the Latin American and Caribbean Initiative for Sustainable Development. ECLAC is proud to have worked alongside UNEP and UNDP in supporting the efforts of the countries of the region during this preparatory phase.

This process has brought to light, once again, the complementarity that exists between world and regional institutions in a heterogeneous international community. Action at the regional level provides a bridge between national realities and global priorities while also addressing mutual problems and other specificities associated with geographic proximity, a shared history and more closely related institutional traditions.

Another reason why regional action plays such a crucial role is that the actors involved in global processes occupy such highly unequal positions. In political terms, this means that the smaller countries will be able to make themselves heard more clearly –or, quite likely, heard at all– within the global order only if they speak with a regional voice. What is more, the growing interdependence of today's world means that, in many cases, the arena for effective, autonomous public action is shifting from the national to the regional or subregional levels.

The most important implication of these facts is that the provision of global public goods and international cooperation in general must be channelled through a network of world and regional institutions, rather than being the domain of a handful of organizations working on a global scale. A system of this sort is not only a more efficient way to achieve common goals, but is also a more balanced system in terms of power relations. The creation of networks of this type –networks that encompass public, private and civil society agents– should therefore be one of the essential aims of international cooperation in all areas, and particularly that of sustainable development. The regional commissions of the United Nations have considerable comparative advantages in supporting this effort.

In the course of this preparatory process, a number of unsustainable trends were identified. Their unsustainability is chiefly attributable to the unequal distribution of development opportunities among the various players in the global economy, to the nature of prevailing production and consumption patterns, and to the insufficient development and inequitable role of developing countries within the global institutional structure. Regional cooperation will be a key element in reversing all of these trends.

Environmental cooperation has made progress in our region in recent decades thanks to the incorporation of the associated agenda into subregional integration processes and to the development of special accords and agencies for the management of shared ecosystems, such as the Amazon, the Caribbean Sea, the Andean ecosystem and the Meso-American Corridor. This dimension is also an integral part of the Plan of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

Latin America and the Caribbean have the most comprehensive network of regional multilateral banks in the developing world. This network is composed of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and three subregional institutions: the Andean Development Corporation (ADC/CAF), the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI) and the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB). This network should play a more active role in providing intermediation services for the range of financial mechanisms that will be developed to meet the challenges of sustainable development. This is why institutions such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the new payment mechanisms to be devised to provide compensation for global environmental services (to address, in particular, global climate change and the loss of biodiversity) should be designed with a view to their future role as regional institutional networks which can be backstopped by the financial and technical cooperation networks that are already in place in the developing world.

In closing, I would like to underscore how important it is to apply this same concept in the social sphere. The European Union is unquestionably the international process that has upheld this principle the most forcefully. The philosophy underlying that agreement has ensured that the steps taken to deepen economic integration over the past few decades have been coupled with an active policy of “social cohesion”. A policy of this nature should also be applied in the integration agreements concluded among developing countries and in the free trade accords signed between developed and developing countries, implementing in both cases the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities at the regional level. In the long run, these endeavours should converge towards the establishment of a true world social cohesion fund. These efforts must necessarily engage all the relevant actors –governments, intergovernmental bodies, civil society and the business community– that have accepted our invitation to participate in this dialogue on the regional dimension of sustainable development.