

**Statement by Alicia Bárcena, Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission
for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)**

ECOSOC operational activities for development segment, 2019

Day 2. Maximizing results: getting the regional architecture right

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Thank you, Mr. Chair,

At the outset, I should like to reaffirm that cooperation, interaction and mutual support between regional commissions and resident coordinators (RCs) is already happening. As stated yesterday by Lebanon, Bangkok, and Costa Rica, RCs are actively participating in our policy intergovernmental platforms. It is as if a big wall has disappeared: the RCs becoming part of the Secretariat family has been a worthwhile and mutually beneficial experience.

The regional commissions value this newfound direct interaction and relationship with the RCs to the benefit of our member States. We are committed to this and trust it will be further strengthened. This is the narrative and positive evolution in the regions that we are committed to build upon moving forward.

My presentation will focus on the five proposals of the Secretary-General's report.

**I. Value proposition of the regional level and the regional commissions –
commonalities among the regional commissions**

This reform is meant to clarify —and make more effective— the value proposition of the regional dimension of the United Nations development system (UNDS), and

in particular of the regional commissions in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The regional commissions offer convening power, their work as think tanks, and technical cooperation and peer learning, anchored in facts, evidence and understanding of realities in the regions.

We are convinced that the member States of the regional commissions value and understand the importance of intergovernmental regional cooperation and integration in support of country demands and priorities as an essential dimension to complement the global level, as testified to by the experiences cited by China, Kazakhstan, Cuba, Denmark, Ireland, Mexico, Morocco, Norway and the Russian Federation, for example.

The regional dimension of development goes far beyond the sum of actions at the national level, since many development issues must be addressed from a transboundary perspective and with a subregional or regional approach.

The regional dimension offers a valuable setting for engaging member States and other stakeholders in substantive and multidisciplinary debates on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and means of implementation in areas where regional collaboration is essential, such as integration, trade, fiscal policies, technology, migration and climate change.

The regional dimension offers a place for subregional cooperation, transboundary issues and better understanding of the political context and sensitive issues.

The regional dimension brings other region-based entities such as the European Union, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the African Union and the Caribbean Community into the implementation of the SDGs.

It builds common positions for the provision of regional public goods (comparable data, observatories, norms and standards).

Regional multilateral/intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder platforms—in particular the regional forums for sustainable development— have become the locus for peer learning, for preparing voluntary national reviews, for discussing gaps and barriers for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and for strengthening integration between the three dimensions: economic, social and environmental.

These are key platforms where four pillars come together:

1. Member States (implementing entities—mainly planning bodies— plus institutes of statistics and selected ministries of finance) to discuss issues such as trade, fiscal policies, technology and, of course, issues that require regional or subregional cooperation such as migration and climate change.
2. New-York-based permanent representatives with their capitals' implementing agencies.
3. The regional forums for sustainable development have also become the space for member States to conduct interactive conversations with the funds, programmes and specialized agencies of the United Nations working at the regional level and with the RCs.
4. Other stakeholders such as civil society, parliamentarians, the private sector and local authorities.

These platforms also support an informed discussion of the outcomes of the intergovernmental subsidiary bodies for policy dialogue at the thematic level, on issues such as statistics, gender, population, planning, and science, technology and innovation. Some of these are organized and convened jointly with funds,

programmes and specialized agencies, for example, the Regional Conference on Women jointly with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of women (UN-Women), the Regional Conference on Social Development jointly with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), or the Regional Conference on Population and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean jointly with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

The regional forums for sustainable development have become true communities of knowledge and practice open to all entities of the United Nations development system at regional, subregional and national levels, as well as to other stakeholders, aimed at setting common agendas on development issues to support member States in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

II. Regional collaborative platforms

Therefore, we believe that the regional collaborative platforms (RCPs) should operate in a decentralized way under the supervision of the Deputy Secretary-General, but be coordinated by the regional commissions in close cooperation with the Development Cooperation Office (DCO), with full accountability to member States.

The policy pillar should be coordinated by the regional commissions and the operational pillar should be undertaken by DCO. The two pillars should work closely with each other.

We fully support holding an annual meeting of the respective RCP back-to-back with the regional forums on sustainable development to ensure interaction of the funds, programmes and specialize agencies and RCs with member States.

The RCP should be complemented with issue-based coalitions on themes prioritized by member States. Some examples are:

- Food security jointly with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Food Programme (WFP), the regional commissions and others.
- Future of work jointly with the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the regional commissions and others.
- Climate change jointly with the United Nations Framework Conference on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the regional commissions and others.
- Sustainable cities jointly with the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the regional commissions and others.

A change of mindset is the premise for the entire regional revamping exercise. This change of mindset is crucial throughout the implementation phase of the transformations identified by the Secretary-General. It requires perseverance to “sink in” and permeate the various stakeholders in the regions. The leadership of the Deputy Secretary-General is critical in this context.

The change in mindset is also a prerequisite for the unified regional collaborative platform to succeed.

This entails, among others, ending the entrenched false dichotomy between the policy and operational spheres within UNDS and forging a more seamless dynamic nexus between them. It also requires innovative tools and platforms to pool

regional expertise on-demand and to fund the support for in-country development work. Innovation will be key in moving forward. In this context, we believe the regional commissions and DCO will have a critical joint responsibility in supporting the RCPs.

It is with this in mind that the regional commissions have offered to host the regional desks of DCO in all the regions, which could also entail efficiency savings.

A successful RCP structure will also require building on existing capacities and leveraging the various assets in the regions. For instance, we at the regional commissions, among others, have a well-recognized leadership and coordination role for policy coherence in the regions, as reasserted by the Member States under the auspices of ECOSOC over 20 years ago (see ECOSOC resolution 1998/46, annex III, para 13). We also have long-standing strategic partnerships with regional and subregional organizations and multilateral development banks in our regions. We believe that continuing to play our team leadership role in policy coordination, including through the SDG policy pillar of the RCPs, will be critical for the RCP to deliver effectively on its policy and partnership objectives.

In the Latin American and Caribbean region, we were fortunate enough to have a DCO Regional Director appointed early, on 1 March 2019, and we invited him just two weeks after he took up his duties, precisely to identify ways to strengthen the regional-national nexus and our collaboration with RCs and United Nations country teams (UNCTs). We have identified a few quick wins, as well as longer-term opportunities:

- Systematic support by regional commissions for the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) — formerly the

Common Country Analysis (CCA) and United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF).

- Induction programmes for all new RCs at the regional commissions (in fact, a recommendation of phase 1 of the regional review): all RCs will come to regional commissions to get to know our staff, become familiar with our analytical frameworks, seek specific knowledge or data depending on the priority topics of their host country, and learn from the experience of other countries in similar situations or with similar challenges.
- Prepare, jointly with DCO and UNDP, a regional course for economists in RC offices focusing on macroeconomics, financing for development, and so forth.

III. Regional knowledge hubs, statistics and data

In relation to knowledge hubs, statistics and data, the regional commissions have become ecosystems of data and statistics and are the repositories of comparable economic, social and environmental data and statistics provided by national statistics systems, household surveys, population censuses and data from United Nations entities at the global, regional and national levels.

We are currently developing “SDG gateways” to make available:

- Comparable data on the progress towards reaching the SDGs.
- Information on data gaps, capacities and readiness of national statistical systems to measure the SDG indicators, which is crucial for United Nations entities at the regional and national level to develop capacity-building.

- Peer learning processes in the framework of the regional meeting with all the region's national statistical systems, the Statistical Conference of the Americas. In this process, we work hand-in-hand with the custodian agencies of the United Nations and we invite RCs to participate as well.
- Support for the development of data ecosystems at regional and national levels, including the traditional and non-traditional data communities, such as on geospatial information, big data, and so forth.
- Regional observatories on specific areas of SDG follow-up and implementation, for instance—in Latin America and the Caribbean— on the integration and alignment of national development plans with the SDGs, which should be a starting point for collaboration between UNCTs and national governments.

IV. Region-by-region approach

Regional specificities - illustrative areas and context

Besides the common features we share, there are also regional specificities for which each regional commission can leverage its own specific added value and its specific regional and subregional settings and capabilities.

- Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP): a pan-Asian approach with a strong track record on trade facilitation and disaster risk reduction.
- Economic Commission for Africa (ECA): strategic partnership with the African Union and ability to jointly push forward key development areas such as

trade integration and financing for development, through knowledge generation, policy advocacy and data for evidence-based decision-making.

- Economic Commission for Europe (ECE): strongly positioned to push forward normative agendas with a pan-European approach in key areas such as infrastructure, trade facilitation, road safety and public-private partnerships.
- Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA): strong partnership with the League of Arab States and very well positioned to strengthen the nexus between conflict prevention and development.
- The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) has historically been a school of development theory and practice, integrating evidence-based policies on economic, social and environmental issues, with strong statistical and analytical capabilities.

In the case of ECLAC, we have developed strategies with RCs and funds, programmes and specialized agencies on two important priorities in response to direct demands from Member States:

1. Comprehensive Development Plan for Northern Central America and Mexico

- Programmatic development of 15 priority issues selected by the four countries.
- Inter-agency proposal to implement the plan jointly, led by ECLAC, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UNDP.
- Collaboration in the framework of the United Nations Network on Migration
- Four pillars of action that address origin, transit, destination and return.

2. **“Caribbean first” strategy**

- Operationalize the debt-for-climate swap initiative.
- Strategic advocacy on de-risking.
- Reaffirmed commitment to implement the SAMOA Pathway and SIDS agenda.
- Build capacities for national statistical systems to bridge the data gap.
- Continued support for prevention, resilience-building, damage and loss assessment and post-disaster needs assessment.

V. Efficiency gains and regional assets

Member States naturally expect to see efficiency gains as a result of the reform efforts. In this important effort, however, we must be aware that much would be lost by reducing regional assets to numbers of staff and budgets.

Regional assets include knowledge assets, convening assets, data and statistics assets, policy expertise assets, partnerships assets, and physical assets, to name but a few. These have been recognized as valuable assets by the Centre for International Strategic Thinking (CEPEI) and are providing much appreciated support for national and regional priorities. Looking at numbers alone would seriously erode the value propositions enshrined in these asset stocks.

What is more, expectations of efficiency gains need to be extended to all levels, not only the regional.

The regional commissions, as United Nations Secretariat entities, have already played a part in the Secretary-General's management reform, seeking efficiency gains in the Secretariat. For years, we also have reduced our ratio of programme support to our programme of work (as witnessed biennially, and now annually, by the General Assembly through the Fifth Committee). More importantly, we have aligned our programmes and conference structures to the 2030 Agenda over the last few years under the guidance and approval of our member States in the regions, as subsequently endorsed by ECOSOC and the General Assembly. We are happy to leverage our valuable existing physical and programme support assets in support of the efforts of UNDS to achieve efficiency gains in the regions. We heard yesterday from the RC in Thailand about some of these positive effects, with ESCAP support for the operational effectiveness of UNDS in the region. This could be replicated in other regions with the support of other regional commissions — and they stand ready to provide it.

Thank you.