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ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY IN THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Note by the secretariat

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1. Introduction

1. The twenty-fourth session of ECLAC will be held in Santiago, Chile, from 8 to 15 April 1992, i.e., a few weeks before the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro. The session will offer the members of ECLAC a unique opportunity to review, from a Latin American and Caribbean perspective, the region's expectations as to the results of that Conference, the tasks that need to be accomplished to bring about these results and the appropriate follow-up activities.

2. Background material for this review already exists: first, the document Sustainable Development: Changing Production Patterns, Social Equity and the Environment, which the secretariat presented at the March 1991 Regional Preparatory Meeting, held in Mexico City, for the Rio de Janeiro Conference,¹ and the consensus reached at that meeting as reflected in the Tlatelolco Platform on Environment and Development;² second, the activities of the Preparatory Committee for the Conference, which held three meetings in 1990 and 1991 and will hold one more, from 3 March to 4 April 1992;³ third, the studies completed recently by various bodies, including in particular Our Own Agenda, elaborated by a group of experts in the region and co-sponsored by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), with the support of ECLAC, and the Action Plan for the Environment in Latin America and the Caribbean, adopted by the Seventh Ministerial Meeting on the Environment in Latin America and the Caribbean, held in October 1990 under the auspices of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in Trinidad and Tobago;⁴ and finally, the Manaus Declaration, issued at the Second Meeting of Presidents of Amazon Countries, held in Manaus, Brazil, on 10 and

¹ ECLAC, Sustainable Development: Changing Production Patterns, Social Equity and the Environment (LC/G.1648/Rev.2-P), Santiago, Chile, May 1991. United Nations publication, Sales No. E.91.II.G.5.

² See ECLAC, Report of the Latin American and Caribbean Regional Preparatory Meeting for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (LC/G.1656(Conf.80/3)), Santiago, Chile, April 1991.

³ Place and dates of these meetings: Nairobi, August 1990; Geneva, March/April 1991 and Geneva, August/September 1991.

⁴ See, among others, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Final Report of the Seventh Ministerial Meeting on the Environment in Latin America and the Caribbean (UNEP/LAC-IGVII/4), 1990, and Latin American and Caribbean Commission on Development and Environment, Our Own Agenda, Washington, D.C., Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 1990.

11 February 1992,⁵ and the Canela Declaration, issued at the Meeting of the Presidents of the Southern Cone Countries, held in Canela, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, on 20 and 21 February 1992.⁶

3. The present report of the ECLAC secretariat, in compliance with General Assembly resolution 44/228, is based on the most salient aspects of the Tlatelolco Platform, which reflect the collective position of the Governments of Latin America and the Caribbean with regard to the Rio de Janeiro Conference. It also presents the proposals of the Manaus and Canela Declarations and offers a brief look at the evolution of the preparatory process for the Conference and its impact from the regional standpoint. Finally, it formulates proposals on the follow-up activities after the Conference, taking into account the regional commitment to development with social equity.

2. The Regional Preparatory Meeting organized by ECLAC

4. In compliance with the mandate contained in General Assembly resolution 44/228, ECLAC organized the Latin American and Caribbean Regional Preparatory Meeting for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, which was held in Mexico City in March 1991. As mentioned above, the secretariat prepared a working document for that meeting entitled Sustainable Development: Changing Production Patterns, Social Equity and the Environment.⁷

5. The document explores in detail the environmental dimension of changing production patterns with social equity, considering this dimension as an integral part of this transformation and not as an alternative option. It notes that natural capital is one of the forms of capital involved in the development process and that, like other forms of capital —human, cultural, physical or financial— it must be preserved and augmented. The secretariat document goes further, however, by pointing out the need to ensure a proper balance among the uses of the various forms of capital, in order to reach high levels of development that can be sustained through time. It also suggests a number of options and policies for obtaining this result.

6. Following the debates of the Regional Preparatory Meeting, the ministers and representatives of the Latin American and Caribbean countries adopted the Tlatelolco Platform, in which they agreed on principles and initiatives to help ensure the sustainability and equity of development processes in the region and identified certain critical areas in which the region should redouble its efforts.

7. The Tlatelolco Platform stresses, *inter alia*, the need for an effort by the entire international community to ensure sustainable development in a context of social equity; it holds that the promotion of such development requires the adaptation of international legal and institutional mechanisms and "is incompatible with the imposition of environmental and economic conditionalities and with restricted access to technology"; notes that unsustainable development models have prevailed, especially in the

⁵ Manaus Declaration on the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Manaus, Brazil, 10 February 1992.

⁶ Canela Declaration of the Presidents of the Southern Cone Countries preparatory to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Canela, Brazil, 20 February 1992.

⁷ This document was inspired by a secretariat proposal the previous year, entitled Changing Production Patterns with Social Equity. The Prime Task of Latin America and the Caribbean in the 1990s (LC/G.1601-P), Santiago, Chile, 1990. United Nations publication, Sales No. E.90.II.G.6.

developed countries; stresses that the joint fight against poverty requires profound changes in economic and social policies; and underlines the need for access to decent living conditions, adequate levels of social organization, political representation and genuine participation of the population in the determination of their own development paths as requisites for achieving sustainable development.

8. The Tlatelolco Platform also formulates important proposals in various specific fields of special interest to the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, including finance, technology transfer, protection of natural resources and eradication of poverty.

9. The Platform remains valid today, almost a year after its adoption. From a global standpoint, not much progress has been made in implementing its proposals. The international effort required in order to reverse the present trends towards environmental degradation has made slow progress, and not necessarily at the initiative of the most highly developed countries. A similar situation exists with respect to the transfer of new, environmentally sound technologies and access to these technologies: few advances have been made in associating them to the need to ensure the competitiveness of Latin American and Caribbean products in international markets. Moreover, direct or indirect environmental conditionalities have tended to multiply and intensify, while the international economic environment points to no significant positive changes for the region. However, thanks to the actions taken by United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and Governments, there exists a growing degree of recognition of environmental problems and of the need to ensure environmental sustainability.

10. The adaptation of legal instruments and institutional arrangements to current needs has not made fast enough progress, despite the efforts of most United Nations agencies involved in the regional quest for more lasting and efficient levels of coordination.

11. As part of the follow-up activities after the Regional Preparatory Meeting, and with the hope of delving more deeply into certain technical aspects of the Platform, ECLAC and UNEP convened a meeting of a Group of Experts on Ocean Policy Aspects of the Tlatelolco Platform from 29 to 31 July 1991, in order to review its contents more thoroughly and provide input to Working Group II of the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in respect of its mandate on ocean, marine and coastal matters.

3. Other background information

12. The convening of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in 1972 enabled ECLAC to consolidate a number of activities which it had been developing in that connection. In September 1971, the Latin American Regional Seminar on Problems of the Human Environment and Development was held, at which the secretariat presented the still highly valid document entitled "The human environment and economic development in Latin America".

13. From 1975 to 1980 a number of projects were executed, including one on styles of development and environment. The studies and experiences stemming from this study, together with the relevant recommendations of a regional seminar, led ECLAC and UNEP to consolidate their efforts through joint projects coordinated by an ECLAC unit —formed in April 1980— which was aptly named the Joint ECLAC/UNEP Unit on Development and Environment.

14. In addition, the impact on the international approach to natural resources and environment produced by the signing of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea resulted in the establishment by ECLAC and UNDP, in early 1983, of a joint project on marine resources and development in Latin America. The Natural Resources and Energy Division also carried out various projects from 1989 to 1991 on the management of water basins and natural resources.

15. In January 1990, as a logical consequence of the postulates on sustainable development contained in the document Changing Production Patterns with Social Equity, and also bearing in mind the new dimension of the environmental issue brought to the fore by the upcoming United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the ECLAC secretariat decided to establish the Environment and Human Settlements Division, which combines the work of the Joint ECLAC/UNCHS Unit on Human Settlements and the Joint ECLAC/UNEP Unit on Development and Environment.

4. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development

16. The meetings of Presidents of the Amazon countries and of the Southern Cone countries, and the public announcement of their common position to the effect that the need for economic and social development should be linked to environmental conservation and protection, attest to the increased interest of Governments in making progress towards solving the environmental crisis which threatens the survival of the planet. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development will offer an opportunity to consolidate the bases of a process leading to such progress.

17. The general objective of the Conference is to ensure that the environmental issue is fully incorporated into the economic agenda, transforming the development styles and policies of both developed and developing countries in order to protect the ecological balance of the planet and, at the same time, to ensure equitable development.⁸

18. In principle, three basic outputs can be expected from the Conference:

a) The adoption of an "Earth Charter", a declaration of principles to be signed by heads of State or their representatives. A political document of this type would enshrine the principles governing the future conduct of nations and peoples with regard to the environment and development, to ensure the viability and integrity of the Earth as a habitat for all living beings;

b) The signing of the conventions on biodiversity and climate change currently being negotiated in other United Nations forums and expected to be ready for formalization at the Rio de Janeiro Conference, and the possible adoption of a framework agreement on a future forestry convention;

c) An agreement on the so-called Agenda 21, which is a proposed global, flexible programme of action on issues to be debated at the Conference, allowing each country to find elements therein which coincide with its own agenda. This action programme would be carried out by the international community, on the basis of a series of commitments to be undertaken between Governments and civil

⁸ See United Nations General Assembly resolution 44/228 on the convening of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

society at global, regional and national levels. This Agenda would cover a range of topics very similar to those of the Tlatelolco Platform.

19. Although international undertakings are contemplated, perhaps the most important part of the process will be the actions to be taken in each country to harmonize its political, economic, social and environmental policies. This effort would presumably make it possible to lay the foundations for creating and implementing systems of renewed international technical cooperation and financing that would also be in line with the objectives of development in a context of social equity and environmental sustainability at the planetary level.

20. Thus, one of the most important goals for the developing countries is that three fundamental instruments should emerge from the Conference in order to make it feasible to implement Agenda 21. These cross-sectoral and complementary instruments are as follows: fresh, additional financial resources; efficient mechanisms for technology transfer and access; and institutional strengthening at all levels—international, regional, national and local—to implement any agreements reached.

21. The Conference would be a milestone in a process, in its current phase based on the Brundtland Report (Our Common Future), which will continue in future. In fact, significant advances have already been made in the preparations for this event, such as the broad mobilization of all United Nations agencies through their participation in the working groups in which the Secretary-General of the Conference has acted as a facilitator; and the renewal of the inter-agency dialogue between specialized agencies with environmental agendas—FAO, UNDP, UNEP, UNESCO—and others traditionally devoted to economic topics—GATT, UNIDO, UNCTAD and the regional economic commissions.

22. For Latin America and the Caribbean, the Rio de Janeiro Conference and, in particular, the process of which it is a part, represent a special chance to put forward once again some of the most salient items on its priority agenda for development, including access to markets, eradication of poverty, reduction of the external debt, access to technologies and development finance.

23. The fourth meeting of the Preparatory Committee, to be held subsequent to the date of the present note (in March 1992), will focus primarily on the above-mentioned cross-sectoral problems: obtaining of fresh, additional resources for sustainable development; technology transfer and access; and institutional strengthening of the United Nations system for development. Notwithstanding that all countries have made an effort to avoid a confrontational tone in these matters, there is still a certain trend towards a division of views between the developing and developed countries. In other words, the debate tends to be a reflection, to a certain extent, of the old North-South dichotomy. That there is no unanimity within each group of countries weakens this trend, and opens up new opportunities for negotiation and agreement.

24. It is unrealistic to hope that the Conference will find solutions to all the environmental and developmental problems that exist at the global level. Rather, what is to be expected is a consolidation of a series of commitments in the context of a long-term process. It is therefore essential, as mentioned above, to have an institutional order to promote and assess compliance with these commitments, and to augment the pool of resources that will make the implementation of Agenda 21 feasible. In that context, it is hoped that the Rio de Janeiro Conference will result in additional global commitments with regard to the objective of achieving sustainable, equitable development.

25. It is important for the region to continue seeking areas of agreement that enable it to take a common medium- and long-term position in negotiations with other groups of countries. Latin America and the Caribbean possess considerable natural assets, including biodiversity, which need to be taken into account in the post-1992 negotiation process.

26. Lastly, in line with the guidelines for the work of the Secretary-General of the Conference,⁹ it is expected that the regional dimension will tend to take on more importance than ever. Accordingly, the regional economic commissions, together with UNEP and UNDP, form the core of support for the implementation of the decisions taken at the Conference, in conjunction with regional multilateral financial institutions.

5. The role of the regional economic commissions in dealing with the topics contained in Agenda 21 and in follow-up activities

27. Along these same lines, and in view of the experience and technical capacity of the regional economic commissions in dealing with multidisciplinary and cross-sectoral issues, these commissions could play an important role in the activities designed to follow up the Conference, especially in relation to the incorporation of the environmental factor into the development process. The strengthening of technical bodies and regional political forums will be essential in order to follow up the activities of the various bodies —both within and outside the United Nations— involved in sustainable development projects; this reinforcement will also be crucial in promoting and executing country programmes for strengthening institutions so as to improve their technical capacities and management of sustainable development.

28. The regional commissions also have gained the necessary cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary experience to carry out studies to identify economic, social and environmental problems at the regional, subregional and national levels. Moreover, they can help design strategies, policies and methodologies to encourage sustainable development with social equity, including designing and implementing systems of indicators and natural heritage accounts related to the traditional type of national accounts.

29. The regional commissions are likewise in a particularly good position to organize forums at various levels, promote periodic technical meetings and provide support to Governments in harmonizing economic and social policies with the objectives of equity and sustainable development, and the commitments undertaken in the various intergovernmental negotiation forums.

⁹ See United Nations General Assembly, Role of regional organizations and cooperation (A/CONF.151/PC/100/Add.26), New York, 1992, and The role of the United Nations regional commissions in relation to "Agenda 21". Report of the Secretary-General of the Conference (A/CONF.151/PC/151), New York, 13 February 1992. Documents presented at the fourth session of the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, New York, 2 March-3 April 1992.

6. The region's specific needs

30. This generic agenda takes on specific meaning in Latin America and the Caribbean, especially in that it strengthens the ties among environmental, social and economic policies, whether global in scope, sectoral or territorial/spatial. The perceived needs with regard to this challenge in the region may be divided into two major groups.

31. Outstanding in the first group of needs are those which are instrumental in achieving a more effective linkage between the formulation and the application of economic, social and environmental policies:

- a) Development and adaptation of new economic policy tools—in line with regional realities—to facilitate the changing of production patterns with social equity and environmental sustainability;
- b) Improvement of the region's capacity to evaluate the economic impacts of environmental policies on its various levels and sectors, and vice versa;
- c) Development of tools to analyse economic and environmental performance—regional, subregional, national and local—such as environmental accounting, economic assessment of environmental impact; and systems of environmental indicators and accounts correlated with traditional types of national accounts;
- d) Increased conceptual and instrumental capacity of the countries of the region to analyse more fully the relationship between poverty and environmental issues;
- e) Improvement of the legal and institutional instruments required for the design and application of sustainable development policies, plans and projects which also enhance social equity;
- f) Development of intraregional and national mechanisms which can act jointly and alternatively to provide the necessary national and/or subregional counterpart to the international financing of sustainable development with social equity.

32. The second group of needs, which are more concrete in terms of streamlining development management, includes the following:

- a) Modernization and improvement of governmental politico-administrative management systems and consolidation and harmonization of legal and institutional frameworks, whether national, regional or international;
- b) Human resources training at all levels, in areas relating to modern management of environmental issues and their connection with changing production patterns and socially equitable development;
- c) Enhancement of current levels of knowledge about the state and evolution of the region's natural and cultural heritage through the implementation of reliable, dynamic databases and information dissemination systems;

- d) Strengthening of governmental and non-governmental institutions to promote growing citizen participation in the formulation of policies for sustainable development with social equity, ensuring that citizens' groups have systematic access to information.

33. This list is not exhaustive. The way in which the topic of sustainable development is addressed has changed as knowledge and negotiations have progressed in various forums. Hence another need should be mentioned in addition to those discussed above: the need to keep constantly abreast of the topic.

7. The role of ECLAC in follow-up activities

34. Bearing in mind that the 1992 Conference is likely to achieve the three basic results expected (Earth Charter, conventions on biodiversity and climate change and Agenda 21), and taking into account the above-mentioned needs, regional action should focus on a series of activities that will need to be undertaken after June 1992. These activities in turn are related to the three major cross-sectoral problems (fresh additional financial resources, technology access and transfer and institutional strengthening) considered in the context of Latin American and Caribbean development priorities. It is expected that these actions will be undertaken by the secretariat following consultation with the member States and in cooperation with other United Nations agencies and multilateral financial institutions.

35. From the standpoint of **institutional strengthening**, two factors should be taken into account: the institutionality of the system to which the Commission belongs, and the strengthening of regional and national capacity for development management with equity and sustainability.

- a) The Earth Charter —or the declaration of principles which will emerge from the Rio de Janeiro Conference— will undoubtedly constitute the political framework which will establish, at the global level, the principles to guide international behaviour in relation to the environmental and development issues;

- b) It should be noted here that a number of negotiation processes which will remain incomplete or will be scarcely touched upon at the Conference (e.g., protection and ordering of land resources, protection and management of oceans, seas and coastal zones) will necessitate later follow-up. In this context it will be important for the region to keep up the search for points of agreement and consensus positions on the concept of sustainable development and equity;

- c) It will no doubt be necessary to create a flexible mechanism to guide the political debate on future actions and to propose actions to improve environmental legislation and its enforcement, including international law aspects. ECLAC could help to establish a regional forum for that purpose, through a more intensive use of its own organizational structures;

- d) The institutional activities to be promoted by the secretariat include support to national, subregional and regional programmes for strengthening governmental and non-governmental institutions, in order to bring about more and more citizen participation in the formulation of sustainable development policies which enhance social equity.

36. At the same time as ECLAC can serve as a political forum, its pool of experience and technical capacity also suggest that it can be of even greater use as a technical secretariat and liaison between the sectoral activities of the United Nations system and the international financial institutions operating in the region. In the short and medium term, it is essential for the region to coordinate the objectives of

economic growth with sustainability and social equity, which will involve a reasonable effort based on a cross-sectoral approach.

37. At the same time, ECLAC is in an extremely advantageous position in terms of skills improvement and training programmes in formulating and implementing programmes, policies and projects in the field of environmentally sustainable development with equity.

38. ECLAC can also play a role in coordinating the tasks being carried out by many non-governmental organizations which are involved in sustainable development activities in the region, following up the work carried out and drawing conclusions that may be useful in fulfilling the objectives of the Commission itself.

39. The absorption and dissemination of technical progress is crucial to moving forward in this direction. A number of activities are listed below whose results can be channelled into various spheres, including technical advances, environmental sustainability, international competitiveness and social equity. Their objective would be to provide the Latin American and Caribbean countries with technical inputs which would facilitate, on the one hand, international negotiations in this field on favourable terms and which help, on the other hand, to raise the competitiveness of regional products and services in international markets. It is in this context that the following activities are contemplated:

a) In the implementation process, having access to efficient and environmentally sound production technologies plays a decisive part in the attainment of sustainability and equity. Thus, in light of the results of the Conference, mechanisms and bodies will have to be either created or strengthened, as appropriate, to help make these technologies more readily available. Special attention should be devoted to future modalities for linking this process with the draft international code of conduct on the transfer of technology.

b) The access to technologies —by transfer or generation— is directly related with human resources training, a topic which will be dealt with in the framework of a reassessment of education as part of the process of changing production patterns with social equity and environmental sustainability.¹⁰ What is required, *inter alia*, is to incorporate into the new education projects any additional components that will promote environmentally sound technological change and increase regional productivity.

c) In response to future rights and duties that may emerge from the possible participation of the Latin American and Caribbean countries in the international instruments on biodiversity and climate change, a judicious, ongoing assessment should be made of the economic impact of these instruments on the countries of the region. This implies the need to implement, both regionally and nationally, systems for evaluating and monitoring economic activities linked to these proposed conventions or affected by them.

d) It is becoming necessary to establish a mechanism for following up the issues included in Agenda 21 and those which the Governments of the region have granted priority in the Tlatelolco Platform, or in other intergovernmental agreements. In this context, the countries will have to be provided with technical inputs to facilitate the implementation of the actions agreed on in the Agenda programmes.

¹⁰ See ECLAC, Education and Knowledge: Basic Pillars of Changing Production Patterns with Social Equity (LC/G.1702(SES.24/4)), Santiago, Chile, 1992.

e) Under the agreements governing regional and subregional integration of markets, studies will need to be made and proposals formulated on the coordination of environmental management policies related with technological development in similar production sectors or ecological systems (in particular those involving use of shared resources, including urban resources), or which regulate trade, such as phytosanitary controls.

f) Under a policy to strengthen the region's position in international trade, it is important to identify operational strategies for monitoring the negotiation and implementation of global, regional and national environmental standards. This should also take into account environmental standards with regard to foreign investment and trade-related transactions which either explicitly or implicitly involve new conditionalities.

40. ECLAC could cooperate with Governments in determining the amount of additional resources needed to carry out programmes to ensure the sustainability of development. It could also help to analyse the most appropriate means of financing, and to evaluate the fulfilment of international commitments undertaken by the region to obtain such resources.

41. This list of suggested activities to follow up the Conference, in which ECLAC could participate in conjunction with other United Nations bodies and multilateral financial institutions, is of course not exhaustive. It merely covers certain topics of particular interest to Latin America and the Caribbean.

42. Many of the contributions of ECLAC to the future work in this area can be carried out under the regular United Nations budget. Other tasks remain, however, in which the secretariat lacks the technical experience and human and financial resources necessary to tackle them in the short or medium term. These include, inter alia, compliance with the mandate received in General Assembly resolution 44/226 on traffic in and disposal, control and transboundary movements of toxic and dangerous products and wastes.