

Report of the Third Forum on Human Rights Defenders in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean

Basseterre, 7–10 April 2025



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Report of the Third Forum on Human Rights Defenders in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean

Basseterre, 7–10 April 2025



This document is the official report of the Third Forum on Human Rights Defenders in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Saint Kitts and Nevis from 7 to 10 April 2025. The Forum was convened by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), in its capacity as Secretariat of the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (Escazú Agreement), in partnership with the Government of Saint Kitts and Nevis, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women).

The report was prepared by the Secretariat of the Escazú Agreement.

Thanks are extended to the organizing team of the Forum and staff of partner organizations: Carlos de Miguel, David Barrio, María Andrea Sanhueza, Gabriela Burdiles, María Francisca Aguilar, Natalia Labbé and María Paz Rivera (ECLAC); Michelle Brathwaite, Sara Nuero, Bruna Perestrelo, Carolina Moreno, Ignacio Roncagliolo, Ricardo Neves (OHCHR); Andrea Brusco, Abi Márquez, Deirdre Shurland (UNEP); Juliet Solomon, María Cortes (UNDP); Lorena Lamas, Joaquín Antonio Naranjo (UN-Women); and Joyelle Clarke, Colincia Levin and Derionne Edmeade (Government of Saint Kitts and Nevis); and Kerissa Roberts (Consultant, Expertise France).

Financial support for the document was provided by Expertise France, the Ford Foundation and the Waverley Street Foundation.

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United Nations publication
ISSN: 1680-9041 (electronic version)
ISSN: 1680-9033 (print version)
LC/TS.2025/103
Distribution: L
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Printed at United Nations, Santiago
S.2500551[E]

This publication should be cited as: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. (2025). Report of the Third Forum on Human Rights Defenders in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean. *Seminars and Conferences Series* (116) LC/TS.2025/103).

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Summary

The Third Forum on Human Rights Defenders in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean was held in Basseterre from 7 to 10 April 2025.

The Forum was convened by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), as the Secretariat for the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (Escazú Agreement), in partnership with the Government of Saint Kitts and Nevis, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women).

The objective of the Third Forum was to provide an opportunity for reflection and dialogue concerning the situation of persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters in Latin America and the Caribbean. The Forum also served as a platform for sharing experiences and good practices in promoting, safeguarding and protecting the rights of environmental defenders and for furthering the implementation of the of the Action Plan on Human Rights Defenders in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean, as adopted in decision III/2. In addition, the Forum served as a venue for the continuation of discussions and consultations on the preparation of a manual on gender mainstreaming in the implementation of the Escazú Agreement.

The Forum therefore focused on the following specific topics:

- Identifying and raising awareness of the risks faced by human rights defenders in environmental matters in Latin America and the Caribbean, learning more about the work they do and recognizing those efforts.
- Furthering the implementation of the Action Plan on Human Rights Defenders in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean and monitoring progress in that regard.

- Contributing to knowledge and analyses around national, regional and global mechanisms and initiatives for promoting, preventing and protecting defenders, as well as local initiatives and self-protection strategies undertaken in various contexts.
- Building capacity and cooperation among the Parties, the public and other stakeholders.
- Continuing discussions and consultations concerning gender mainstreaming in the implementation of the Escazú Agreement.

This document is the official report of the Third Forum on Human Rights Defenders in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean. It summarizes the various panel discussions, dialogues and presentations that took place there. It also includes the programme for the implementation of the Action Plan on Human Rights Defenders in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean of the Escazú Agreement prepared by the coordinators of the open-ended ad hoc working group and a systematized overview of the contributions of the breakout groups regarding gender mainstreaming in the implementation of the Escazú Agreement.

I. Background and context

The Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (the Escazú Agreement) is the first regional environmental treaty in Latin America and the Caribbean and the first in the world to set out specific provisions on the protection of persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters.

Article 9 of the Escazú Agreement states that each Party shall guarantee a safe and enabling environment for persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters so that they will be able to act free from threat, restriction and insecurity. It also establishes that each Party shall take adequate and effective measures to recognize, protect and promote the rights of human rights defenders in environmental matters and shall take appropriate, effective and timely measures to prevent, investigate and punish attacks, threats or acts of intimidation that such defenders may suffer while exercising the rights set out in the Agreement.

To support the implementation of article 9 of the Escazú Agreement, at the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Escazú Agreement, held in Santiago from 20 to 22 April 2022, the Parties decided to establish an open-ended ad hoc working group on human rights defenders in environmental matters (decision I/6) (ECLAC, 2022).¹ This working group is currently led and coordinated by Chile, Ecuador, and Saint Kitts and Nevis, whose mandate has been extended to cover the period up to the close of the regular meeting of the Conference of the Parties to be held in 2030.²

By decision I/6, the Parties entrusted the working group with the task of drawing up an action plan concerning human rights defenders in environmental matters in Latin America and the Caribbean.

¹ ECLAC, First meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean, "Decision I/6, Human Rights Defenders in Environmental Matters, available at: https://acuerdodeescazu.Cepal.org/cop1/sites/acuerdodeescazucop1/files/22-00345_cop-ez.1_decisiones_aprobadas_4_may.pdf.

² In accordance with decision III/2 adopted at the third meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Escazú Agreement (ECLAC, 2025), pp. 5-14.

The Action Plan on Human Rights Defenders in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean was submitted and adopted (decision III/2³) at the third meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Escazú Agreement, which took place from 22 to 24 April 2024. Decision III/2 also established that forums on human rights defenders in environmental matters in Latin America and the Caribbean should be held in 2025 and every two years thereafter, with recognized specialists in the field and with the assistance of the Secretariat.

³ Decision III/2, by which the Parties adopted the Action Plan on Human Rights Defenders in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean.

II. Place and date of the Forum

The Third Forum on Human Rights Defenders in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean was held in Basseterre from 7 to 10 April 2025. It was organized by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), in its capacity as Secretariat for the Escazú Agreement, in partnership with the Government of Saint Kitts and Nevis, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women).

III. Objectives of the Forum and items for discussion

The purpose of the Third Forum was to provide an opportunity for reflection and dialogue concerning the situation of persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters in Latin America and the Caribbean. The Forum also served as a platform for sharing experiences and good practices in promoting, safeguarding and protecting the rights of environmental defenders and for furthering the implementation of the Action Plan on Human Rights Defenders in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean, as approved by decision III/2. In addition, the Forum served as a venue for the continuation of discussions and consultations on the preparation of a manual on gender mainstreaming in the implementation of the Escazú Agreement, which, as established in decision III/4, is to be presented at the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties in 2026.⁴

The Forum therefore focused on the following specific topics:

- Identifying and raising awareness of the risks faced by human rights defenders in environmental matters in Latin America and the Caribbean, learning more about the work they do and recognizing those efforts.
- Furthering the implementation of the Action Plan on Human Rights Defenders in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean and monitoring progress in that regard.
- Contributing to knowledge and analysis around national, regional and global mechanisms and initiatives for promoting, preventing and protecting defenders, as well as local initiatives and self-protection strategies undertaken in various contexts.
- Building capacity and cooperation among the Parties, the public and other stakeholders.
- Continuing discussions and consultations concerning gender mainstreaming in the implementation of the Escazú Agreement.

⁴ In accordance with decision III/4 on gender mainstreaming, adopted by the Parties at their third meeting. Available at: https://acuerdodeescazu.cepal.org/cop3/sites/acuerdodeescazucop3/files/2400669s_cop.ez3_decisiones_aprobadas_6_mayo.pdf (pp. 17-18).

IV. Attendance

The Forum was attended in person subject to prior registration and accreditation. It was also streamed online. There were 342 registered participants (67% women and 33% men) from 25 different countries. The persons in attendance included representatives of States Parties to the Escazú Agreement and United Nations agencies, experts, members of the public, representatives of groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters and representatives of civil society, Indigenous Peoples and local communities. The Forum was also broadcast live on the ECLAC YouTube channel, with 1,516 views.

V. Forum proceedings and summary of meetings

The Forum began on Monday, 7 April, with preparatory activities and training workshops for members of the public in the Caribbean. During the morning of 8 April, open preparatory meetings were held in the Action Hub and led by elected representatives and coordinators of the working group on environmental defenders. In the afternoon of that day, the Forum was officially opened, and a high-level dialogue was held on women's political leadership roles in environmental protection. It was followed by a first panel discussion on the challenges and risks faced by environmental defenders in Latin America and the Caribbean. The day of 9 April was devoted to plenary meetings, with panel discussions, dialogues and round tables focusing on the implementation of the Action Plan. During the meetings held on 10 April, breakout groups focused on gender mainstreaming in the implementation of the Agreement. In parallel with those groups' meetings, two capacity-building workshops were held on access to justice and digital security.

The discussions and the main points made in each meeting are summarized below:

A. Preparatory activities

1. Training workshop on the Escazú Agreement for persons and groups that defend human rights in environmental matters in the Caribbean

The workshop was organized by ECLAC and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) with support from Expertise France and held on 7 April. Its purpose was to familiarize the participants with the Escazú Agreement and promote a dialogue among the focal points for the Escazú Agreement and members of the public in the Caribbean. Its participants included civil servants, representatives of civil society organizations, environmental defenders and members of the general public of the Caribbean subregion.

The workshop included brief presentations on the main aspects of the Escazú Agreement, its institutional architecture and each substantive article. Examples were then given of its practical applications in order to provide the participants with a clear idea of the fundamental components of the Agreement.

Four discussion groups were then formed so that the participants could focus on specific provisions of the Agreement and share examples and ideas about ways of furthering its implementation in the Caribbean and in their individual countries. During the last part of the workshop, representatives of each group shared selected best practices.

2. Open preparatory meeting of elected representatives of the public

On 8 April, an open preparatory meeting organized and facilitated by the elected representatives of the public was held. Its purpose was to review the Forum's agenda and the key issues to be addressed, to share knowledge about the situation of human rights defenders in environmental matters in the region and to plan out the ways in which members of the public could contribute to the implementation of the Action Plan.

3. Meeting of the open-ended ad hoc working group on human rights defenders in environmental matters

The meeting was moderated by Gabriela Burdiles, a member of the Secretariat of the Escazú Agreement, who explained that the objective of the meeting was to present the results of the public consultation process concerning the implementation of the Action Plan and the outcome document prepared by the working group's coordinators.

Derionne Edmeade, speaking in representation of the Government of Saint Kitts and Nevis, recalled that the Action Plan on Human Rights Defenders in Environmental Matters had been adopted in decision III/2 at the third meeting of the Conference of the Parties in 2024. He noted that the Action Plan included 4 priority areas to be addressed and 20 strategic measures to be carried out through 2030 in order to further the implementation of article 9 of the Agreement. That decision also provided for the continued coordination of the ad hoc working group by Chile, Ecuador, and Saint Kitts and Nevis. Area D of the plan concerned the development of an implementation programme that would specify the responsible parties, timetables and possible sources of support for the priority actions defined in the Action Plan. In order to prepare the way for work on that task, the coordinators had drawn up a programme proposal based on discussions held between October and December 2024 with the working group, the Presiding Officers and the elected representatives of the public. That proposal had then been submitted for consultation to the Parties to the Agreement and the public from January to March 2025 on the Regional Public Mechanism platform. The public consultation had yielded 94 responses. (For a summary of the main comments and suggestions made during the public consultations, see annex A2 of this report.)

Constance Nalegach, representing the Government of Chile, noted that the implementation programme was intended to provide guidance, but its contents should be interpreted with flexibility when being applied by the different countries. The final version of that document (see annex A1 of this report) incorporated the input provided during the public consultation process. She then outlined the main changes that had been made in the proposed implementation programme, which covered implementation at both the regional and national levels, and noted that greater specificity had been achieved in the definition of the activities and outputs called for in each of the priority areas. Provision had also been made for greater public participation and for the inclusion of new collaborators in the various activities. Priority area A, on knowledge creation, merited special consideration. The design of the relevant methodology for preparing the regional assessment had been included, and provision had been made for a participatory process. Preparatory activities for the forums to be held in 2025, 2027 and 2029 had also been included. Readily accessible resources were to be provided in connection with the Observatory on Principle 10 in Latin America and the Caribbean, and provision was to be made for the dissemination of the work done in that area in different formats and using various platforms. In priority area B, on recognition, the format for exchanges and partnerships between defenders and States parties included the creation of opportunities for dialogue and the formation of networks for information sharing. Dissemination efforts and actions aimed at raising public awareness would include campaigns and informational materials to be provided in different formats and on different platforms, along with the previously developed maps of stakeholders for use in organizing activities to support recognition and promotion.

Juan Enrique Iglesias García, speaking on behalf of the Government of Ecuador, said that, in connection with priority area C, on capacity-building, the preparation of the document setting out regional guidelines would involve public participation and would reflect the findings and conclusions of the regional assessment. Technical support and assistance for the Parties included training activities for civil servants and national authorities and the development of guidelines for the development of road maps and national implementation plans. Activities for coordination and collaboration among prevention and protection mechanisms included in-person or virtual cooperative events and training. In order to encourage adherence to international guidelines, training activities led by experts in the field and activities for the dissemination of best practices would be conducted with institutions that furnished free legal assistance to human rights defenders in environmental matters. The portion of the document on training on the Escazú Agreement focused on different target groups and provided for the organization of dialogues and opportunities for exchanges among justice officials and human rights defenders in environmental matters. In relation to priority area D, on evaluation, follow-up and review, the document indicated that the Parties would be invited to give presentations on their progress at the Forums and to submit regular reports at the meetings of the Conference of the Parties, which might include road maps and implementation plans for publication and dissemination.

The floor was then opened for questions. One participant asked about the role of ombudsmen in the Action Plan's implementation. In response, it was noted that ombudsmen played a key role in protecting defenders and helping to prevent attacks against them and in conducting exhaustive, impartial and fair investigations into such attacks. In response to a query about what the next steps in the Action Plan's implementation would be, the coordinators indicated that the implementation process provided for specified activities up to 2030 and that various milestones in the implementation process had been defined. Significant advances in carrying out the priority actions defined with the active collaboration of members of the public were expected by the time the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties was held in 2026. In closing, the coordinators encouraged the Parties and other participants to remain steadfast in their commitment to the Action Plan.

4. Action Hub: A space for sharing ideas around environmental action and defence

The Action Hub, held on 8 April, was a dynamic, open event providing an opportunity for showcasing the work of persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters in Latin America and the Caribbean and for sharing good practices, experiences and lessons learned. It provided a platform for the presentation of initiatives, projects and experiences and for sharing successes and results, as well as for recognizing and highlighting efforts being made in the region to protect the environment and implement the Escazú Agreement. It also offered an opportunity for building networks among the Forum's participants to help them work together and strengthen regional links. To that end, four concurrent breakout groups were held at which presentations were made that had been requested and selected beforehand by the Secretariat. A total of 20 presentations⁵ were given in the open, interactive groups in which all the Forum participants were able to take part.

⁵ The following organizations took part: Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL), Marine Ecosystems Protected Areas (MEPA) Trust, Comunicación y Educación Ambiental S.C., the Amazonia+ Programme, OHCHR, Climate Network Action Latin America (CANLA), Cabildo Inga de Condagua, Office of Indigenous People's Affairs of Belize, Alianza Latinoamericana de Defensoras y Defensores del Territorio Indígena (ALADTI), The Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI), IM-Defensoras, UNEP, the Government of Mexico, Global Witness, Danish Institute for Human Rights and Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, EscazúNow Regional Network, Caribbean Youth Environment Network (CYEN), Asociación Ambiente y Sociedad and Fundación Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (FARN). The full Action Hub agenda, which details the selected initiatives, is available at: https://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/events/files/agenda-action-hub_1.pdf.

B. Opening session

At the opening session, statements were made by Carlos de Miguel, Chief of the Sustainable Development and Human Settlements Division of ECLAC; Terrance Micheal Drew, Prime Minister of Saint Kitts and Nevis; Michelle Brathwaite, Regional Representative of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for the Caribbean Community (CARICOM); Marcelo Cousillas, Director of Legal Affairs of the Ministry of the Environment of Uruguay, in his capacity as Chair of the Presiding Officers of the Escazú Agreement; and Nicole Leotaud, elected representative of the public for the Escazú Agreement.

The Chief of the Sustainable Development and Human Settlements Division of ECLAC welcomed the participants to the Forum. He noted that it was a special occasion because it was the first time that a meeting of that type had been held in the English-speaking Caribbean. He went on to describe some of the challenges facing the region, such as the marked degree of inequality, weakness of the institutional framework, climate change and the sluggish pace of growth in gross domestic product (GDP), but he also pointed out that the Escazú Agreement offered a way to address those concerns step by step, in a participatory manner, while leaving no one behind.

The Prime Minister of Saint Kitts and Nevis said that his country was honoured to be hosting the Forum, which was being attended by environmental defenders from throughout the region. He recalled that the Escazú Agreement had been ratified by his country in 2019 in order to promote transparency and inclusiveness in decision-making on environmental issues and that, in 2022, the country had taken on the responsibility of coordinating the open-ended ad hoc working group on human rights defenders in environmental matters as it worked to address threats, acts of intimidation and other forms of aggression against environmental defenders. His government was committed to overcoming that challenge and wished to express its gratitude to ECLAC, the other organizations that had helped to organize the Forum and all the persons in attendance. Their presence attested to the fact that the Forum embodied the region's unified response to a crucial issue.

The Regional Representative of OHCHR for CARICOM reaffirmed her organization's steadfast commitment to the protection and promotion of human rights defenders. She underscored the importance of article 9 of the Escazú Agreement and reminded the participants that, if they all wanted to protect the environment, they needed to start with those who worked to defend it. She urged all the participants to promote the role of those defenders and the champions of the Escazú Agreement so that it would continue to hold out a hope for a healthier and better environment.

The Director of Legal Affairs of the Ministry of the Environment of Uruguay and Chair of the Presiding Officers of the Escazú Agreement, observing that the Escazú Agreement was the first international treaty to contain an article specifically addressing the need to protect human rights defenders in environmental matters, outlined a number of cases involving renowned environmental activists that served to underscore the importance of protecting persons and groups who were working to defend the environment and of advancing that cause. Participation in the Agreement needed to be expanded to include all 33 countries of the region. Decision I/6, adopted by the Conference of the Parties and establishing an ad hoc working group to develop an appropriate action plan (a plan which had then been adopted at the third meeting of the Parties to the Conference in 2024), was focused on creating knowledge in the region around that issue, recognizing the work of defenders and building the Parties' capacity to implement article 9. In closing, he thanked the Secretariat for having organized the Forum and expressed his hope that the Forum would be successful and would help to bring about change in the region.

The elected representative of the public for the Escazú Agreement, highlighted the pivotal role of public participation in giving the region a real voice that would allow it to have a genuine influence in determining how key environmental issues were addressed. She thanked the various Caribbean

organizations represented at the Forum for their support and collaboration in training and awareness-raising activities focusing on the Agreement. The elected representatives were deeply committed to their task of ensuring that public participation would be meaningful and would be taken into account in decision-making processes. She closed her remarks with a call to action for all stakeholders to work together and become true defenders of the Agreement's implementation.

1. High-level dialogue: Women's political leadership in environmental protection

The dialogue was organized by Club de Madrid and ECLAC and moderated by Gomin Camacho, founder of the Guyana Environment Initiative (GEI) and Executive Director and Secretary of the Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC) of Guyana. The dialogue focused on ways of guaranteeing a role for women in environmental decision-making and defence within a more secure and gender-aware ecosystem. Prominent women political leaders active in the areas of human rights and environmental protection were invited to share their ideas and personal experiences in that connection.

The panellists were Joyelle Trizia Clarke, Minister of Sustainable Development, Environment, Climate Action and Constituency Empowerment of Saint Kitts and Nevis; Allyson Maynard-Gibson, former Attorney-General and Minister of Legal Affairs of the Bahamas and an adviser to Club de Madrid; and Patricia Madrigal, former Deputy Minister for the Environment of Costa Rica and currently the Chair of the Committee to Support Implementation and Compliance of the Escazú Agreement.

The moderator opened the dialogue with a brief introduction of the topic in which she stressed the importance of women's participation in environmental decision-making in promoting both gender equality and environmental action. Women's presence in political decision-making could be a contributing factor in the setting of more ambitious climate and environmental targets and policies. While it was true that wide gender gaps in environmental leadership remained in all the countries and sectors of Latin America and the Caribbean, many women leaders and women's organizations in the region and around the world were building powerful networks for combating environmental degradation and addressing climate-related inequalities and impacts.

The moderator then invited the panellists to share their views about the challenges facing women who were engaged in environmental protection efforts and about how those challenges could be overcome.

Allyson Maynard-Gibson said that some of the main challenges had to do with women's limited access to justice and the psychological intimidation, harassment and violence experienced by women in a variety of settings, especially if they voiced opposition to certain types of decisions. National policies for implementing the Agreement were lacking, and women encountered many different cultural and economic barriers and faced discrimination that often left them feeling isolated. Ways of overcoming those challenges included creating solid networks and partnerships among women to provide legal and psychological support, building educational capacity and programmes focusing on specific gender issues that could be incorporated into school curricula from the primary grades on up, creating safe spaces for women's leadership and developing incentives for their participation, putting in place measures for promoting the work of women defenders and providing them with better protection, including the compilation of disaggregated data and the establishment of legal reforms where necessary, and raising awareness in international forums about women's struggles.

Patricia Madrigal described her personal experience in becoming involved in environmental protection. As a child, she had been a Girl Guide and a Girl Scout and, thanks to that and other experiences, she felt a connection to nature and had become committed to protecting the environment. As a lawyer specializing in environmental issues and in public international law, she knew that the right to a healthy environment was a human right and that those rights were inextricably linked to one another. She had worked as a legal adviser to public institutions, environmental organizations and global movements

seeking to build women's capacity and defend that human right. She had also served as the Deputy Minister for the Environment and Energy of Costa Rica in the negotiation of the Escazú Agreement from 2014 to 2018. All of those activities had influenced her work and her determination to encourage women to become involved in environmental defence efforts. They also showed how personal, academic and professional experiences could come together and reinforce each other.

Joyelle Clarke said that, above all, young women needed to have the opportunity to exercise leadership in a meaningful way. Women could do a great deal and could find leadership roles in different institutions in Saint Kitts and Nevis, but they needed to be encouraged. Work needed to be done in the schools to help girls and adolescents grow into leaders. When she was young and in school, she had been given the opportunity to join the Brimstone Hill Fortress National Park Society, and that experience had taught her to love geography, to be committed to protecting nature and, eventually, to become the Minister of Sustainable Development, Environment, Climate Action and Constituency Empowerment for her country. Her country's commitment to the advancement of women was clear to see. Organizations such as Caribbean Women in Leadership (CIWIL) had helped to ensure that women were at the forefront of the participatory democratic process. Great strides had been made, but there were still milestones that had yet to be reached.

The moderator then asked the panellists what the Escazú Agreement meant to them and how its effective application from a gender perspective could be ensured. Allyson Maynard-Gibson said that the first step was to open up access to information and to women's participation in decision-making, together with access to justice so that their voices could be heard. In addition, women environmental defenders needed protection, and the Escazú Agreement needed to be implemented on the basis of a gender perspective by building capacity through regional cooperation and monitoring. Space had to be made for women to express their views in safety. Patricia Madrigal said that, since so many gender gaps existed, that aspect of inequality had to be addressed, and the gender perspective had to be given priority in the Escazú Agreement implementation process. Lastly, Joyelle Clarke observed that the Escazú Agreement held out the hope of achieving greater accountability and greater access to justice and public participation by women in environmental protection efforts.

C. Panel 1: Challenges and risks faced by human rights defenders in environmental matters: perspectives, experiences and responses in Latin America and the Caribbean

The panel discussion was moderated by Ryan Bachoo, a journalist and environmental activist from Trinidad and Tobago. Its focus was on the challenges and risks faced by persons, organizations and groups working to defend human rights in environmental matters in Latin America and the Caribbean, especially when they seek to exercise their rights of access in their own territories. Defenders' stories and experiences in the region were shared in order to show how those challenges could be met and how an organized response to threats could be marshalled, all of which served to show that the implementation of the Escazú Agreement was in fact possible.

The members of the panel were Anika Redhead, in representation of Grenada Land Actors, a platform for professionals, community organizations, nongovernmental organizations and private stakeholders working to support sustainable land management; Ruth Alipaz Cuqui, National Coordinator for the Defence of Native Indigenous Territories and Protected Areas (CONTIOCAP), an umbrella organization for 35 different movements throughout the Plurinational State of Bolivia; and Brayan Mojanajinsoy, representative of the Asociación de Cabildos Indígenas del Municipio de Villagarzón Putumayo (ACIMVIP) of Colombia, which worked to defend the cultural values of the Inga Peoples, their peaceful coexistence and their respect for the natural world.

The moderator introduced the issues to be discussed by the panel members and underlined the importance of the fact that the Forum was being held in the Caribbean and the inclusion of organizations from the subregion. He recalled the recent assassination of two defenders and pointed out that they were not isolated cases in Latin America and the Caribbean, where many people had paid with their lives for trying to protect the environment by peaceful means. He noted that the current session offered a very valuable opportunity for learning about the risks faced by persons working to defend their rights and posed a number of questions for the consideration of the panellists.

First of all, he asked them to draw upon their experiences and their realities in order to pinpoint what the main difficulties encountered by environmental defenders were.

Anika Redhead said that the greatest difficulty faced by environmental defenders in Grenada was their limited access to public information. In 2020–2021, Grenada Land Actors had submitted official requests for information on three development projects in coastal areas containing ecosystems of special importance, but those requests had been denied. The organization had also been questioned about its work, and its members had been labelled as “agitators” and described as being opposed to development. In March 2024, the organization had been found to have legal standing to lodge an appeal for judicial review of decisions taken by the Planning and Development Authority to issue permits without a prior environmental impact assessment and while failing to keep publicly available records. Nevertheless, one of the main hurdles was that, in many cases, public authorities and officials were not sufficiently familiar with environmental laws or with the public's rights in environmental matters. It was sometimes particularly difficult to obtain legal representation because many lawyers shied away from becoming involved for fear of finding themselves embroiled in conflicts or being criticized.

Ruth Alipaz Cuqui said that the greatest challenge for Indigenous communities in the Plurinational State of Bolivia was the failure of public institutions to take action to protect the environment or to uphold people's rights, especially in the case of the rights of vulnerable groups. One example was the mercury poisoning of the population caused by irresponsible, poorly regulated mining activities in the Madre de Dios river basin. Heavy metals, and particularly mercury, were being dumped into Beni River and its tributaries, and many Indigenous women were suffering from the effects of using contaminated water. People who opposed those practices and sought to defend their territories were also the target of stigmatization, criminalization and harassment.

Bryan Mojanajinsoy said that one of the greatest challenges for the Inga Peoples of Putumayo was the stigmatization, criminalization and persecution of Indigenous communities by armed forces operating in their territories. There was a serious dispute around illegal mining activities, oil drilling and, lately, investments in REDD+ forestry projects in the Amazon. There was no clear information or community participation in decisions regarding such activities even though they were taking place on his Peoples' ancestral lands. In the face of those challenges, they had organized themselves, and the communities had banded together to protect themselves, since State mechanisms had proven to be ineffective.

The moderator then asked the panellists how the Escazú Agreement could help them confront those challenges. Anika Redhead said that the Agreement could help to provide a protective framework for environmental defence efforts. A number of different types of activities had been undertaken in order to create awareness and educate the public about its provisions. They were also working to advance the application of the Agreement and to help ensure the transparency and accessibility of information on development projects. Training for civil servants was of crucial importance, and there were plans to organize workshops throughout Grenada in order to raise public awareness of the Agreement. For Ruth Alipaz Cuqui, the organization and linkage of the communities in the Amazon was key. That was the objective of the work being carried out by her organization, CONTIOCAP, which was partnering with civil society and academia to compile more information and make use of international protection mechanisms in cases such as, for example, mercury contamination. The Bolivian government

needed to work towards ensuring that the Agreement would be fully applied in the country and to provide training for public and judicial officials. Providing financial support for the affected communities was of key importance in enabling them to continue to work to protect the environment. Bryan Mojanajinsoy said that he hoped that the ratification of the Agreement by Colombia would contribute to protection for human rights defenders in environmental matters. Working for the fulfilment of the Agreement at the international level was vital.

The floor was then opened for comments. A member of the Inga Peoples of Colombia said that her community lived under constant threat, and its members had to organize themselves for their own protection. The Escazú Agreement could help to engender greater trust in institutions, which was needed. Another defender belonging to the Mapuche-Tehuelche Peoples of Patagonia, Argentina, said that her community was confronted with various oil, forestry and mining projects about which no clear information was available, and her community had no say in the decisions being taken about those projects. In fact, those who sought to avail themselves of their rights of access were criminalized and subject to violence. Another environmental defender, from Colombia, said that she worked as a social communicator and that, because of her work, she had been threatened and displaced, and she and her family had been the target of attacks. Her country's protection mechanisms had not been effective in her case, and she called upon all those present to listen to what the communities that were being threatened had to say.

D. Panel 2: Progress and challenges in the implementation of article 9 and the Action Plan on Human Rights Defenders in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean

The second day of the Forum began with a panel discussion on the implementation of article 9 and the Action Plan on Human Rights Defenders in Environmental Matters. The discussion was preceded by a presentation on the programme for the Action Plan's implementation (see annex A1 of this report) by the coordinators of the ad hoc working group.

The coordinators recalled that the Action Plan on Human Rights Defenders in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean established 4 priority areas and 20 strategic measures for advancing towards the full and effective implementation of article 9 of the Escazú Agreement over the next six years (up to 2030). They also reminded the participants that decision III/2, adopted at the third meeting of the Conference of the Parties, invited the Parties and all countries of the region to help to implement the Action Plan and to step up their efforts to develop and strengthen all necessary measures at the national level to safeguard the rights of human rights defenders in environmental matters. They had also emphasized that, to that end, meaningful public participation would be sought out and partnerships would be strengthened with a wide variety of actors, including international agencies, civil society organizations, development banks, the private sector, the academic world and the mass media.

Lastly, they said that, as had been explained at the group's open meeting during the first day of the Forum, in line with priority area D, in order to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the measures set out in the Action Plan, the implementation programme defined the deliverables (activities and outputs) for each priority area and strategic measure, specified who would be responsible for their implementation, set the time frame for implementation and established the level of implementation. All the input received from the public and the Parties had been taken into consideration in the programme's formulation (see annex A2 for a summary of the public consultation outcomes).

Following the presentation, a panel discussion on the next steps in implementing the Action Plan took place. The moderator invited each of the panellists to answer the following questions: What do you

see as being the way forward to achieving the effective implementation of the Action Plan? What are the challenges? What can be done to contribute to implementation?

Irene Murillo, elected representative of the public for the Escazú Agreement of Costa Rica, indicated that the main way to make progress was through meaningful public participation, despite the challenges that such engagement was known to entail. On the basis of decision I/6, members of the public had organized a follow-up procedure and had set up a working group. That group had been working to further the implementation programme ever since the approval of the Action Plan. In preparation for the Forum, in-person and virtual meetings had been organized to explore the challenges involved in the Plan's implementation. One of the public's priorities was the regional assessment that was planned in the priority area of knowledge creation, since that analysis would provide a basis for many of the measures provided for in the Action Plan. Taking into account the local communities, Indigenous Peoples and front-line defenders would be a key factor.

As for the challenges involved in implementing the Action Plan, it was essential for defenders to recognize themselves as such and for the authorities to do the same so that defenders could claim the protection they deserved. Even where government protective mechanisms were in place, defenders often shied away from using them because they mistrusted public institutions. Governments therefore needed to make a systematic, collective effort, rather than instituting piecemeal measures, in order to earn their trust. Gaining access to reliable statistics and other information was also a major challenge, as not enough information was being developed or made available.

Sara Nuero, a Human Rights Officer with OHCHR, said that the protection and promotion of human rights and the environment, and of the persons who defended them, was at the heart of the work performed by her organization. Sadly, Latin America continued to be the most dangerous place in which to defend human rights. OHCHR had verified that numerous arbitrary arrests and detentions, violent acts and instances of criminalization in connection with the work of human rights defenders were still taking place, and the civic space was being restricted in many different ways.⁶ Steps had to be taken as a matter of urgency to halt those attacks. There was a shortage of information, and more documentation of the types of barriers existing in the region was needed. OHCHR had been providing support for the preparation of the Action Plan from the very start and had worked to build public capacity and had furnished technical assistance to the Parties. The effective implementation of the Action Plan would require an approach that took in the whole of society and that would promote greater networking. The need to provide training and instruction to key actors was one of the challenges that would need to be met in order to support effective implementation. The coordination of government institutions also had to be improved in order to provide proper protection for victims and witnesses. Criminal investigation protocols based on a human rights perspective also needed to be improved. Her organization was committed to continue working for the full application of article 9 by providing technical training and capacity-building activities.

Karol Sanabria, representing Ambiente y Sociedad de Colombia, also felt that public participation was the best way forward in the implementation of the Action Plan and that, among the members of the public, front-line defenders were the most important of all because they knew what the situation was like on the ground and what was needed. The collective approach to the protection of defenders taken in both the Action Plan and its implementation programme was very important, as was recognition of the work of human rights defenders in environmental matters as a basis for implementing measures at the national level in line with the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders issued by

⁶ For example, OHCHR registers show that in 2023 the Honduras office received 330 reports of attacks on human rights defenders, while the Guatemala office received 182. Between January 2016 and September 2024, the Colombia office recorded 248 homicides of defenders, 89% of whom were Indigenous persons, persons of African descent or campesinos.

the United Nations in 1998.⁷ But it was important to go beyond simple recognition and awards; capacity-building was needed, as was support for local defence networks, including funding. The framework for the Action Plan was provided by gender-aware, intergenerational, intersectional, territorial and intercultural perspectives, and that framework needed to serve as the basis for a focused assessment backed up by disaggregated data and measures specifically designed for those groups. Doing so would ensure greater ethnic and gender representativity in the application of the Action Plan.

The floor was then opened for comments. A participant from Antigua and Barbuda said that it was important for the national focal points in the region, who were involved with different environmental agreements, to establish regional connections in order to ensure that the Escazú Agreement was integrated into other forums. A participant from Mexico pointed out the importance of conducting capacity-building activities, along with activities focused on recognizing the work of environmental defenders, for the civil servants and public officials working on the front line, such as the members of the police force. A gender perspective also should be integrated into the steps taken to implement the Action Plan. Participants from Guatemala and the Plurinational State of Bolivia called for efforts to counter the normalization of violence against human rights defenders in environmental matters, noting that harassment and the criminalization of their work often went unpunished. There was still a need for information about how to make use of the tools and mechanisms of the Escazú Agreement. A representative of Indigenous Peoples of the Mesoamerican region underscored the need to facilitate Indigenous Peoples' participation in the Escazú Agreement.

The coordinators of the working group thanked the members of the public who had spoken and urged all those present to contact the national focal points for the Agreement in order to work on the implementation of the Action Plan at the national level and to support the adherence of additional parties. They then spoke of the need to learn from the different realities existing in the region and noted that the assessment would be an extremely valuable tool for that purpose.

E. Dialogue: National developments, road maps and article 9 implementation plans

The dialogue was moderated by Andrea Sanhueza of ECLAC. The aim of the dialogue was to learn about the States Parties' priorities and the steps they were taking to implement article 9 at the national level. The moderator explained that ECLAC, as the Secretariat for the Escazú Agreement, provided assistance to the States Parties in plotting out road maps for the effective implementation of the Escazú Agreement that contained a defined set of measures for addressing high-priority areas.

Eight States Parties took part in the dialogue: (1) four countries that had officially issued their road maps: Chile, Ecuador, Saint Lucia and Uruguay; and (2) four countries that were in the process of drawing up their road maps: Grenada, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Mexico and Colombia.

The moderator gave a brief introduction in which she outlined the high-priority areas for the implementation of article 9 that were included in the finalized road maps.⁸ She noted that there were a total of 146 such measures identified in those documents, of which 24 (16%) had to do with the implementation of article 9.

⁷ The Declaration on Human Rights Defenders was adopted by consensus by the General Assembly in 1998 on the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, following 14 years of negotiations (see General Assembly resolution A/RES/53/144).

⁸ The road maps for Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, Saint Lucia and Uruguay have been posted on the ECLAC website for the Observatory on Principle 10: <https://observatoriop10.cepal.org/en>.

The representatives of each of the States Parties then had an opportunity to share additional information and to go into greater detail about their countries' road maps and high-priority areas. They also commented on progress and challenges in their implementation.

1. The road map for Chile

The representative of Chile said that the Participatory Implementation Plan for the Escazú Agreement had been launched in 2024. When the baseline overview of national laws and regulations relating to the provisions of the Escazú Agreement had been drawn up, it had become evident that measures specifically aligned with article 9 were lacking. The preparation of the Plan had been a participatory process from very early on and had included virtual and in-person meetings and events in which over 1,300 people had taken part, meetings with focus groups, meetings with municipalities, interviews with stakeholders and the creation of an online comment box. When the first draft of the plan had been ready, a public consultation process involving local activities had been launched. It had included culturally appropriate workshops in each of the country's regions, workshops specifically designed for children and adolescents and independently organized townhalls at the local level and outside of the country. As a result, the Plan featured 56 high-priority areas and 236 commitments dealing with all the provisions of the Escazú Agreement that would help to ensure an enabling environment for its implementation. The Plan also established a governance system involving 17 public institutions and 14 private actors. Specifically in relation to article 9, support was forthcoming from the Chile-Mexico Fund⁹ that would make it possible to survey and evaluate the situation of human rights defenders in environmental matters in Chile, which was an issue about which no official data were yet available. The Plan also called for the development of training courses for human rights defenders in environmental matters and for justice system personnel. A platform would also be put in place for follow-up and to maintain transparency concerning the completion of the measures to be carried out under the Participatory Implementation Plan for the Escazú Agreement. Chile and Mexico were planning a number of visits with a view to sharing experiences and building capacity in that area.

2. The road map for Ecuador

The representative of the Government of Ecuador said that his country had been the first one to issue its road map, in 2023. He then went on to provide an overview of the progress made since that time. The first step had been to address all the measures that had to do with governance and with the relevant legal and institutional issues. For example, steps had been taken to expand the areas of authority of the Office of the Ombudsman in relation to the protection of human rights defenders in environmental matters, and the law on transparency and access to public information had been reformed. National environmental information systems had been upgraded in order to better inform the population about the country's natural heritage and water resources. Data on 54 environmental indicators and 47 information packets were currently available to the public, along with 15 visualization tools to make environmental information more readily accessible. In addition, the GeoEcuador 2023 report on the state of the environment had recently been launched (Ministry of Environment, Water and Ecological Transition, 2024).¹⁰ They were also working to raise environmental awareness with the help of an environmental education strategy that included over 30 courses open to the public, one of which was on rights of access. In addition, a round table on environmental democracy would soon be organized

⁹ The Club's aim is to further the full and effective implementation of the Escazú Agreement in Chile and Mexico through exchanges of experiences and practices relating to rights of access to information, public participation and access to justice, and the protection of human rights defenders in environmental matters; the identification of opportunities for the Agreement's application in ways suited to national realities and of challenges in that respect; and the formulation of recommendations for strengthening and improving implementation.

¹⁰ Ministry of the Environment, Water Resources and Ecological Transition. "Tras 15 años, Ecuador actualiza el Informe GEO sobre el estado del ambiente": <https://www.ambiente.gob.ec/tras-15-anos-ecuador-actualiza-el-informe-geo-sobre-el-estado-del-ambiente/>.

that would bring together representatives of the public sector, civil society, academia and the private sector. With respect to access to justice, specialized units or sections for handling environmental crimes had been created within the Attorney General's Office, and courses on environmental law were being offered to judicial personnel, including members of the police units in charge of environmental law enforcement, prosecutors and judges.

3. The road map for Saint Lucia

In describing the progress made by her country in implementing the measures in the road map relating to article 9, the representative of Saint Lucia mentioned that the road map was being shared with Members of Parliament and the staff of the judicial branch. Preliminary discussions were also being held with justice officials as part of the implementation of the road map because it had been determined that those officials stood in need of more information and training in connection with the Escazú Agreement. Online training courses had been organized, and courses on article 9, in particular, were to be offered. Awareness-raising activities and campaigns to promote recognition of human rights defenders in environmental matters would be held, now that funding for them had been obtained.

4. The road map for Uruguay

The representative of Uruguay reported that work on the road map had begun in 2023 and was being pursued in cooperation with ECLAC. The preparatory process was headed up by the Technical Advisory Commission on Environmental Protection (COTAMA), which was made up of representatives of the government, the nongovernmental sector and the private sector. The Commission had set up a group tasked with the preparation of the road map. That process had begun with the formulation of a preliminary draft of the baseline situation. As part of that work, the relevant laws and regulations had been analysed and information had been compiled on the basis of over 60 interviews with the main stakeholders. A public consultation process had been held in order to gather more input. That process had been very fruitful, with 72% of the comments coming from civil society, 15% from government agencies and the remainder from trade unions, professional associations and academic institutions. The final version of the road map had been approved by COTAMA in August 2024 and by the Minister of the Environment in November 2024. The road map set out 22 high-priority areas and targets. Two of those measures corresponded to article 9. A new Administration had taken office on 1 March 2025, and the challenge now was to move forward with the implementation of those measures. The new Administration had resolved to adopt the road map and continue with its implementation under the same terms as those approved by the previous Administration.

5. The road map for Grenada

The representative of Grenada explained that she was a member of the steering committee tasked with drawing up the road map for the country in representation of civil society. The steering committee had begun its work in 2024. The baseline analysis of the relevant administrative and legal provisions and of the existing gaps in the Agreement's implementation had been completed, as had a preliminary proposal of high-priority areas for inclusion in the road map, some of which focused on the implementation of article 9. After analysing various options, the committee was inclined to opt for the governance system adopted by Chile in its implementation plan, which called for the creation of coordination units staffed by representatives of the government, civil society, academia and the private sector that would thus strike a balance among the views of all the different sectors. One of the priority areas would be to address the uncertainty or hesitancy felt by many people who wished to request information or take part in the decision-making process. It had also been determined that more training and educational activities around the Escazú Agreement were needed in the country.

6. The road map for Saint Kitts and Nevis

The representative of Saint Kitts and Nevis reported that work on the road map had begun in early 2025 with support from ECLAC. A steering committee had been formed to review and comment on a draft baseline analysis prepared with the assistance of ECLAC and, on 7 April a public consultation had been organized to present the baseline findings and a set of recommendations concerning how to improve the implementation of the Escazú Agreement. Recommendations specifically regarding article 9 included a recommendation to conduct a study on the situation of human rights defenders in environmental matters in the country. A need had also been identified to provide further information and to raise awareness about rights of access in order to build the general public's and nongovernmental organizations' environmental protection capacity. Another vital area had to do with ensuring that the justice system recognized and upheld the rights of human rights defenders in environmental matters.

7. The road map for Mexico

The representative of Mexico said that the government was taking strategic action to further the implementation of the Escazú Agreement. In collaboration with the French cooperation agency, a handbook on the implementation of article 9 and an accompanying users' manual¹¹ had been prepared and could be accessed on the Observatory on Principle 10 website. Both the handbook and the manual promised to be valuable tools, and a second phase of that project had therefore been approved under which the federal government to assist three state agencies to make the necessary preparations to act upon some of the recommendations made in the handbook. With technical assistance from ECLAC, work was proceeding on the road map for the implementation of the Escazú Agreement. Five high-priority areas in relation to article 9 had been identified for Mexico: identifying high-risk zones so that action in those territories could be prioritized; expediting the issuance of effective protective measures suited to the specific needs of defenders; preparing an assessment of the situation of environmental defenders and mapping socioenvironmental conflicts and disputes; developing protocols for communications and coordination among federal and state authorities in the investigation and punishment of crimes committed against environmental defenders; and developing specific protocols for dealing with reports of violations of the rights of human rights defenders in environmental matters.

The mechanism for the protection of human rights defenders and journalists¹² was closely coordinated with local mechanisms at the state level and/or the offices of each state government responsible for that area. Two nationwide events would be held in 2025 which would be attended by representatives of the country's 31 states and the federal district, along with the corresponding ministries of public safety, prosecutors' offices and specialized local authorities, with the aim of improving coordination between federal and local authorities and thereby improving the State's response in that respect. Work was also being done on gender mainstreaming within the mechanism with the support of the Mexico office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). The Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources was taking steps to join in the work of the mechanism. In 2024, it had drawn up a proposed protocol for case management and specific protective measures for human rights defenders in environmental matters. That proposal was now being examined by the Ministry's legal department.

¹¹ See the *Guía de Implementación del Artículo 9 the Escazú Agreement en Mexico* at: <https://observatoriop10.cepal.org/es/instrumento/guia-implementacion-articulo-9-acuerdo-escazu-mexico> and the *Manual de Uso de la Guía de Implementación del Artículo 9 the Escazú Agreement en Mexico*, available at: <https://observatoriop10.cepal.org/es/instrumento/manual-uso-la-guia-implementacion-articulo-9-acuerdo-escazu-mexico>.

¹² See the 2012 law on the protection of human rights defenders and journalists, *Ley para la Protección de Personas Defensoras de Derechos Humanos y Periodistas*, at: <https://observatoriop10.cepal.org/es/instrumento/ley-la-proteccion-personas-defensoras-derechos-humanos-periodistas>.

8. The road map for Colombia

The representative of Colombia said that her country had only recently become a Party to the Agreement but that it had already begun to work on preparing a road map with technical assistance from ECLAC. The map for the implementation of the Agreement in Colombia would be based on its four fundamental pillars, and the work on its development was to proceed on an integrated basis. The principles on which implementation would be based included intersectoral convergence; an intercultural approach that recognized and valued gender, ethnic, demographic and territorial diversity and entailed an effort to curb the discrimination suffered by different groups within the population in various areas; and international action and regional cooperation in partnering with other States and with academic, private and civil society organizations and other stakeholders to share information and good practices.

The main priority areas relating to the protection of environmental defenders being proposed, in line with the obligations associated with article 9 of the Agreement, were: first, the recognition of human rights defenders in environmental matters, on the understanding that society and the State should recognize the importance of the defence of the environment in the struggle to combat climate change and to conserve biodiversity, the serious risks to which defenders were subject and the need to take steps to prevent attacks and threats targeting them and to protect them from such acts of aggression; second, the prevention of high-risk situations and threats against environmental defenders and, as a corollary, the prevention of outbreaks of violence within the context of environmental disputes; and, third, assistance and support in dangerous or threatening situations. Consideration was also being given to the development of a protocol for coordinating assistance for environmental defenders with offices of the national environmental system.

Before the conclusion of the dialogue, the floor was opened up for comments and questions. The representative of Chile was asked about how the workshops held for children and adolescents during the road map's preparation were conducted and what part they had played in the preparatory process. The representative said that support had been provided during the road map's preparation from UNEP, ECLAC and the World Bank for the inclusion of groups that had traditionally been excluded from the decision-making process, whether because of their age—as in the case of children and adolescents—or the fact that they resided in remote areas of the country where in-person consultations were rarely held. Four workshops had been held in locations far from the capital city for children and adolescents; special materials had been prepared for that purpose in an accessible communication style and format. Those workshops had served not only to identify existing gaps but also had provided an opportunity for the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social Development to make specific commitments with respect to those groups. That was of fundamental importance because one of the cross-cutting tenets of the Agreement, together with cooperation, was a focus on vulnerable persons and groups.

The representative of Mexico was then asked what protection mechanisms were in place in his country and what their scope was. He was also asked about how the road map would deal with the preventive aspects of existing protection mechanisms. He explained that the General Act on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists had been promulgated and entered into force in 2012. That law had provided for the creation of such a mechanism and had established how it would be structured. The mechanism had been strengthened over time with additional human and financial resources and through international cooperation. The governance of the mechanism was overseen by a collective decision-making body known as the Governance Board. That body's members included representatives of civil society, as well as representatives of government authorities. The civil society members had full voting rights and played an active part in the deliberations and analysis concerning

each case and in the determination of the protection plans to be established for the mechanism's beneficiaries. Representatives of the OHCHR Office in Mexico participated in the Board's meetings and had the right to express their views at those meetings. The mechanism was designed as a preventive instrument for mounting a response when the State has been notified of an existing threat. The dialogue with other ministerial-level bodies, including the Secretariat for Women and the Secretariat of the Environment and Natural Resources, was essential, as was the furtherance of preventive efforts by means of focused measures such as training courses for various agencies at the state level to help make them aware of all such risks.

The representative of Colombia was asked what opportunities would be provided for participation in the development of the road map for the implementation of the Escazú Agreement and how public participation would be ensured, especially in the case of persons and groups working to defend the environment in Colombia. She was also asked how intercultural action was helping to integrate diverse perspectives in the country concerning the design of environmental policies. She explained that one of the strategic lines of action for implementation of the Agreement would be based on the intercultural dimension and would be focused on recognizing the value of the country's ethnic, gender and demographic diversity. Some headway had been made, and the Colombian government had consolidated a number of forums for dialogue and for building consensus around public policies with ethnic groups and other communities entitled to special protection, such as those that worked with the Permanent Bureau for Coordination with Indigenous Peoples and Organizations (MPC), which had been established in 1996.¹³ The objective of the dialogue was to promote inclusion and the recognition of gender, ethnic, demographic and territorial diversity in the implementation of the Agreement and to strengthen existing mechanisms for narrowing gaps of inequality in access to information and for ensuring equal access to environmental justice.

The representative of Grenada was then asked what steps could be taken to build the capacity of nongovernmental stakeholders to participate in the implementation of the Agreement. She noted that there were many constraints limiting civil society's capacity to follow up on that process. Organizations such as the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) and the Fund for International and Multilateral Advocacy (FIMA) were providing support for civil society in Grenada in the form of resources and training. ECLAC was assisting with the development of the road map, and civil society was working with the government, which had shown itself to be receptive to the proposals made by members of that sector. The steering committee for the work on the road map was made up of government and nongovernmental representatives. The important task at hand was to reach agreement upon feasible measures that could be put into practice with the very limited resources that were available.

F. Round table: Towards a regional assessment of the persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters

The round table focused on providing input for a regional assessment of the situation of persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters, as called for in the Action Plan. To that end, it was organized in two complementary sections. The first concentrated on the collective protection strategies developed by defenders themselves on the ground. The second addressed the existing international and national tools and mechanisms for preventing attacks and

¹³ Established by decree No. 1397 of 1996.

threats targeting environmental defenders, protecting them from such forms of aggression and punishing the perpetrators of such acts.¹⁴

1. Collective protection strategies and initiatives carried out by persons and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters

The first part of the round table was moderated by Carole Excell, Vice Chair of the Escazú Agreement Committee to Support Implementation and Compliance and rapporteur for the Committee's rapid response mechanism. The aim of the session was to explore protection strategies developed by persons and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters.

The moderator opened the session by providing a series of statistics on lethal and non-lethal (such as arbitrary detention) attacks on environmental defenders.¹⁵ She underscored the urgency of the debate on the effectiveness of existing protection measures, the need to reinforce the mechanisms designed by communities on the ground and the importance of understanding the concept of collective protection, the practical application of that approach and the possible ways of linking up community efforts with State responsibilities.

She then introduced the panellists: Tomás Severino (Mexico), representative of the Alliance for Land, Indigenous and Environmental Defenders (ALLIED); Sonia Sánchez (El Salvador) representative of the Mesoamerican Initiative of Women Human Rights Defenders (IM-Defensoras); and Jamner Manihuari (Peru), representative of the Coordinating Body of Indigenous Organizations in the Amazon Basin.

The first question posed to the three panellists was: What collective protection strategies are there and how do they work in their specific organizations?

Tomás Severino said that the Alliance for Land, Indigenous and Environmental Defenders (ALLIED) was a global network that promoted the work of many different stakeholders to bring about systemic change in terms of recognition, support and protection for defenders. The Alliance compiled data on attacks and issued reports on its findings,¹⁶ advocated for the reinforcement of legal and regulatory frameworks for the protection of environmental defenders, provided support for defenders and stood in solidarity with them. Collective protection strategies were developed in response to structural violence and macro criminality in Latin America and the Caribbean, which were perpetuated by alliances of political, economic and criminal sectors acting, in particular, in connection with extractive activities and disputes over natural resources. Faced with such situations, communities had developed their own collective protection and response mechanisms. Their strategies encompassed a set of social and cultural actions and practices aimed at fortifying individuals, groups and communities faced with threats and violence under those systems of oppression. Collective protection mechanisms went beyond the individual and physical dimensions to incorporate emotional, spiritual, cultural and territorial elements involved in the organization of a community and its collective management of its territory. They were not limited to reactive responses to hazardous situations; they also incorporated a preventive logic oriented towards strengthening the community and reducing its

¹⁴ This activity falls within the framework of decision III/2. That decision was adopted at the third meeting of the Conference of the Parties of the Escazú Agreement, at which the Parties adopted the Action Plan on Human Rights Defenders in Environmental Matters. The Action Plan provides for the preparation of a regional assessment as one of the first steps in the process under priority area A, on knowledge creation: "A.1. Prepare an assessment of the situation of persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters in the States Parties, which, depending on the availability of data, considers, among other factors: the number of victims or violations and the different types of violations; international and national instruments and mechanisms related to prevention, protection and punishment, such as early warning systems and protocols for action by national and subnational institutions; existing practices and other experiences and community-based initiatives and self-protection strategies carried out by those who promote and defend human rights in environmental matters.

¹⁵ In 2022, Global Witness documented the deaths of 177 defenders, and the integrated database of the Alliance for Land, Indigenous and Environmental Defenders (ALLIED) registered 916 non-lethal attacks in 46 countries (ALLIED, 2024).

¹⁶ ALLIED, "Data collection and reporting", available at: <https://allied-global.org/data/>.

exposure to new forms of violence. Those mechanisms were underpinned by fundamental pillars such as community autonomy, historical memory, cultural identity and a sense of belonging that reinforced the social and political fabric of those communities.

Many of those strategies were managed very cautiously, given their sensitive nature and their focus on self-defence. Nevertheless, he could share some well-known examples, such as the community guards who protected Indigenous rural territories, self-consultations, communication and visibility strategies, collective legal action and security protocols applied in territorial displacement situations. Subnational cross-border networks for safeguarding collective health and psychosocial support over the long term were also being consolidated. Those networks were just one aspect of a comprehensive approach for providing solutions, and they were being constructed by the people themselves.

Sonia Sánchez then outlined the holistic feminist protection approach developed by IM-Defensoras, a network formed in 2010 to link up defenders, networks and organizations in El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua and Guatemala. IM-Defensoras had been working for over 10 years to record cases of aggression against human rights defenders;²⁷ some 15% of the 35,000 cases of systematized aggression involved attacks on defenders of the land and the environment. Collective protection entailed “knitting networks” to provide support to defenders faced with the many different forms of violence visited upon women defenders because of the work they were doing and simply because of their gender and sexual identity. That approach enabled them to recognize themselves as defenders. It was underpinned by five fundamental pillars: recording and systematizing cases of aggression; providing psychosocial support tailored to the type of violence that had been experienced; self-care and collective care; education and building inner strength; and the creation of shelters where women in crisis, women who were at the end of their strength and women who had been traumatized could heal. IM-Defensoras worked to restore defenders' physical, emotional and spiritual well-being so that they could carry on their struggle with dignity without suffering from burnout or losing their lives. The aim was not only to resist aggression but also to celebrate life and the collective force that sustained the defence of people's territories and their human rights.

Jamner Manihuari, sharing his thoughts on collective protection and risk management in the Amazon, outlined the situation in Peru. Many of the conflict situations facing Indigenous defenders and their territories were fuelled by the expansion of legal or illegal mining, forestry, oil drilling or other extractive activities. People struggling to defend their environmental rights were the targets of numerous threats, which was why it was so important for the countries' governments to recognize and uphold the self-protection mechanisms that Indigenous Peoples had developed by drawing on their own organizational capabilities and knowledge. Community-based protection mechanisms included Indigenous guards and rounds of varying levels of territorial organization and protection. The mapping of warning signs of rights violations and vulnerabilities to such threats in the Indigenous communities of the Ecuadorian Amazon was another type of mechanism. Those kinds of strategies had gradually been developed to face up to repeated acts of violence which the protection guarantees offered by the State had failed to counter. Those mechanisms had been constructed collectively thanks to the alliance and mutual cooperation existing among Indigenous Peoples, but they needed to be reinforced by public policies and backed up with sufficient resources.

The moderator thanked the panellists for their comments, highlighted how collective protection, self-determination and respect for Indigenous cultures were bound together and reaffirmed that the State's role was not to replace but rather to support community mechanisms and help them to coordinate more fully.

²⁷ IM-Defensoras, “Datos que nos duelen, redes que nos salvan. 10+ Años de agresiones contra defensoras de derechos humanos en Mesoamérica (2012-2023)”, April 2024, available at: <https://im-defensoras.org/2024/04/resumen-ejecutivo/>.

Responding to the second question posed by the moderator, on the strengths and weaknesses of those protection mechanisms, the panellists described events and situations experienced in the context of their territorial settings.

Sonia Sánchez said that one of the main strengths of the holistic feminist protection approach was the way in which its networks functioned. The formation of territorial networks of defenders not only allowed them to provide mutual support but also facilitated a greater understanding of the environmental threats existing in each territory. The systematization and recording of data and the gathering of evidence on different forms of aggression also played an important role. That had made it possible to detect patterns of violence and to make it apparent that, in many cases, the aggressors were government employees or agents of the State itself, which discouraged defenders from reporting attacks for fear of reprisals. As far as weaknesses, the main one was the lack of support from the State. Holistic feminist protection strategies were funded and backed almost entirely by civil society organizations, without government funding of any kind. That called the sustainability of those efforts into question and made it necessary to look for ways of strengthening support in order to ensure the networks' continued existence.

Jamner Manihuari said that, in Peru, the main weakness was the absence of State authorities from the territories. No real justice was available for persons who had been threatened or for those who had been murdered for defending their territories. Given that situation, it made no sense to talk about strengths; that would only be a viable issue if the State actually came to its senses and made sure that justice was done in such cases. Indigenous Peoples received no genuine protection from the State. Existing mechanisms were insufficient and out of touch with territorial realities, and that situation amounted to what he would characterize as discrimination against defenders of the environment in Indigenous territories. He called for reflection at the community level, underscoring the fact that, even though they were treated unequally, Indigenous Peoples continued to play a vital role in sustaining life and maintaining the planet's equilibrium.

Tomás Severino said that the strengths of the Alliance's approach came from the communities' strong sense of connection with their territories, their sense of belonging and their intimate knowledge of their surroundings. Those were conditions that enabled them to construct a physically, emotionally and spiritually integrated approach to protection and prevention that strengthened their collective organizations and bolstered their resilience in the face of violence. Despite the attempts made to divide them, the communities had maintained support structures at both the local and international levels that promoted historical memory, spirituality and healing processes. The role of defenders had also become more visible, making it harder to silence them. Article 9 of the Escazú Agreement provided a key tool. While it was not an end-all solution, it did offer an institutional window for positioning those issues in many different forums and for enhancing their legitimacy. As for the weaknesses of his organization's approach, the main ones were its financial precariousness and lack of resources, which meant that the communities themselves not only had to see to their own subsistence but also had to find ways of funding their collective strategies. Other challenges included community fragmentation, depoliticization, forced migration, a lack of opportunities and the absence of relevant territorially based public policies.

Lastly, the moderator opened the floor to members of the public who wished to share their experiences in different countries. Mention was made of the legislative debate going on in Chile concerning a law for the protection of environmental defenders. Representatives of civil society from Chile, Argentina, Peru and El Salvador underlined the urgent need for effective legal frameworks, funding allocations and protection measures that served the actual needs of the relevant territories.

2. International and national instruments and mechanisms related to prevention, protection and punishment

The second part of the round-table discussion was devoted to the presentation and analysis of international and national instruments and mechanisms related to prevention, protection and punishment that were applicable to cases of attacks, threats or acts of intimidation targeting persons, groups or organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters. The session provided an opportunity for a dialogue among the guest experts and was moderated by Anaïd Velasco, a Mexican lawyer specializing in the environment and human rights. The panellists were: Javier Gárate, of Global Witness; Ulises Quero, of the International Service for Human Rights; Erika Castro, Designated Advocate for Collective Rights and the Environment of the Office of the Ombudsman of Colombia; Leonardo Menin, Prosecutor with the Centre for Human Rights and the Protection of Vulnerable Persons of the Office of the Public Prosecutor of the State of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil; and Eric Browne, of the Department of Environment of Saint Kitts and Nevis.

The moderator opened the dialogue with the following question: What were the mechanisms related to prevention, protection and punishment that were applicable to cases of attacks, threats or acts of intimidation targeting persons, groups or organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters?

The representative of Global Witness focused on the protection mechanisms existing at the state and regional levels and on the structural challenges confronting environmental defenders. States and multilateral institutions had created tools and spaces for prevention, protection and punishment, but they reflected a limited, reductionist understanding of what protection was, with the emphasis being mainly on material and physical means of protection. Consideration was not given to broader, holistic approaches that encompassed collective, structural and preventive dimensions such as those touched upon during the preceding panel discussion in connection with community-based self-protection strategies. At the regional level, the inter-American human rights system, and in particular the precautionary measures of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the interim measures of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, were fundamental tools for the protection of defenders. Their effectiveness had been eroded over time, however, largely by States' failure to cooperate with their implementation. Those procedures also often had revictimizing effects by constantly exposing persons to further risks, as they were required to provide evidence and to testify on repeated occasions, which only heightened their vulnerability. There was an urgent need to review the design of the regional protection system and to rethink the way in which the inter-American system viewed the whole concept of protection.

The experiences of Global Witness at the national level were instructive. That organization had been documenting attacks —mainly lethal ones— against defenders of the land and environment for more than a decade.¹⁸ Between 2012 and 2023, the countries where the most murders had been committed were: Colombia (461 cases), Brazil (401), Mexico (203) and Honduras (149). The fact that those were four of the countries with the most highly developed State protection mechanisms reflected the existence of a paradoxical situation: those mechanisms existed because defenders were at grave risk, but the results showed that they were not responding effectively to the threat level that existed. In the case of Colombia, over 15,000 persons were under individual protection programmes, in addition to 318 collective ones. However, at least five persons in such programmes had been murdered in 2024, according to the records of the National Protection Unit and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Colombia. Disaggregated information on persons in protection

¹⁸ Global Witness, "Land and Environmental Defenders report archive", available at: <https://globalwitness.org/en/topics/land-and-environmental-defenders-report-archive/>.

programmes in such countries as Mexico and Brazil could not be obtained, despite his organization's submission of official requests for access to that information. The mechanisms were also highly securitized and reactive systems that often did no more than to hand out bulletproof vests, armoured vehicles or panic buttons, none of which addressed the structural causes of the risks run by defenders or were adequate for protecting entire communities. Protection should be viewed from a holistic standpoint, taking into account risk factors and the need to ensure access to justice and to punish perpetrators of rights violations appropriately. It was important to develop schemes for coordinating and integrating protective measures and for mounting a structural response focusing on the causes of violence, not simply its consequences.

The representative of the International Service for Human Rights began by asking the audience two questions: Who is familiar with the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders? and Who has used the Declaration effectively in their advocacy work? Upon seeing that only some members of the audience raised their hand in response to the first question and that even fewer did so in response to the second, he noted that that reflected a gap between knowledge of international mechanisms and their effective use. There were numerous legal, soft-law and political instruments and mechanisms designed to protect defenders from attacks and to prevent such attacks, but many of them were little known or went largely unused. It had been more than 25 years since the adoption of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders in 1998, and a large number of protection mechanisms had been developed since then. But just because a mechanism existed did not mean that it was necessarily effective or used by persons at risk. There was thus a need for people to learn about the mechanisms that were in place and to make strategic use of underused mechanisms, particularly soft-law instruments, such as the treaty bodies' individual communications procedures, which were available to the nationals of States that had recognized the treaty bodies' competence. The early warning measures of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, for example, had been used in situations where Indigenous communities were being criminalized and persecuted, with one specific example being an early warning procedure used recently in connection with forced evictions in the communities of Alta and Baja Verapaz, Guatemala, in which the Committee had addressed the situation of defenders from a collective perspective. That underused mechanism could be especially useful for Indigenous Peoples in the region.

There were also United Nations system mechanisms, especially the Human Rights Council and its special procedures, such as the special rapporteurs and working groups. Although the use of such mechanisms did not always result in concrete sanctions, they did provide a valuable way to make specific cases or systematic patterns of violations of defenders' rights more visible. Alliances among local communities, grassroots organizations and international actors had been particularly effective in bringing certain cases to the world's attention, which had helped to move investigations forward and, in some cases, even to put a stop to attacks that were under way. Lastly, he invited those present to become familiar with what was known as the Declaration+25 initiative,¹⁹ a document which detailed the regulatory inroads, emerging mechanisms and good practices developed since the adoption of the Declaration of 1998. That report offered an up-to-date reading of the Declaration in the light of the challenges faced and the lessons learned over the past 25 years.

The Designated Advocate for Collective Rights and the Environment of the Office of the Ombudsman of Colombia said that, while her Office did not have the investigative powers of other departments of the Public Prosecutor's Office, it nonetheless played a vital role in identifying and preventing high-risk situations using innovative mechanisms that had been developed in the course of the internal armed conflict in her country. The Early Warning System was a tool created over 20 years earlier in response to widespread violence. That mechanism had been given regulatory status by decree

¹⁹ International Service for Human Rights, Declaración+25, available at: <https://ishr.ch/es/herramientas-para-personas-defensoras/recursos/declaracion-25/>.

No. 2124 in 2017, which had accorded official recognition of the System's importance and had established that a territorial dimension was to be reflected in the mapping of risks posed to the civilian population. Initially designed to provide warnings of the locations of high-risk areas associated with the armed conflict, the System has evolved to include protection for environmental and territorial defenders. In March 2024, the Office of the Ombudsman had issued its first defender-specific warnings to alert defenders under threat in the Colombian Amazon biome. Those warnings not only made the risks of human rights violations visible; they did so on the basis of a contextual analysis that took into account the territory, the role of defenders and the actors involved. That approach had played a key role in assisting other agencies with investigative functions, such as the Public Prosecutor's Office, to gain more clarity about the identities of environmental defenders, which, in turn, was of key importance in carrying out investigations that were broader in scope and that were not confined to searching for material perpetrators but that also sought to identify the persons who planned and directed attacks. The Office of the Ombudsman worked directly to ensure legal recognition of the role of defenders and to strengthen channels for access to justice.

The Early Warning System helped to correlate risk factors with the vulnerabilities and capacities of the affected communities and State institutions and to identify institutional weak spots that could then be addressed. The mechanism thus not only provided information but also helped to provide guidance to the authorities in the form of specific recommendations aimed at deterring illegal armed action, preventing human rights violations and strengthening institutional responses. The warnings issued by the Office of the Ombudsman were sent out to all government agencies but were also publicly announced and disseminated and were used by civil society organizations as tools for enforcement and protection. The Office of the Ombudsman actively followed up on its recommendations and convened meetings with the authorities to present its findings and urge them to provide an effective response. The Early Warning System was thus a replicable good practice that could help governments to implement the Escazú Agreement.

The representative of the Office of the Public Prosecutor of the State of Rio Grande do Sul said that Brazil had two main instruments for the protection of defenders: the National Protection Policy established by presidential decree in 2007 and the National Programme for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, Communicators and Environmentalists, which had been created by decree in 2019 and had subsequently been updated. The national policy established general principles and specific guidelines, while the National Programme provided a way to coordinate protection measures. The Programme's Deliberative Council was coordinated by the Ministry of Human Rights and Citizenship. Subnational governments could also set up programmes of their own under arrangements with the federal government. However, the lack of a law that formalized the programme weakened its effectiveness as an instrument of State policy. Bill No. 4557/2009, which would convert the National Programme into a federal law, had been stalled in the Chamber of Deputies since 2011. The absence of a national protection plan had been commented upon by the courts, including both the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, which had denounced Brazil in the case of the murder of the defender Gabriel Salles Pimenta, and by the Regional Federal Court of the Fourth Region, which had noted the government's failure to have drawn up the plan called for under the 2007 national policy. However, since then, the Salles Pimenta Technical Working Group had been instituted by federal decree and, in December 2024, it had finalized a proposal for a national protection plan that was currently under review by the President of Brazil. That proposal was more specific than the national policy and broader in scope than the National Programme. It was divided into three main work streams, each of which had strategic objectives, programmed actions, targets, indicators, designated institutions assigned to it and established timetables, all of which represented an important stride forward in the formation of a robust, comprehensive protection framework in Brazil.

The representative of the Department of Environment of Saint Kitts and Nevis said that there were government agencies with the necessary powers and authorities to deal with such cases, such as the Ministry of the Environment, which was responsible for environmental protection. Members of the public could obtain legal support from the country's legal assistance offices, and the Constitution guaranteed the right of freedom of expression, whereby people could report, express their views about and publicly criticize actions of the government or any situation of public interest, including via social networks and other media. Saint Kitts and Nevis recognized the international human rights framework, which reinforced the existing guarantees that enabled people to assert their rights through the national justice system and obtain information and access the institutional mechanisms available to the public and civil society organizations.

The moderator then asked the panellists what the strengths of those mechanisms were and what challenges they faced.

The representative of Global Witness said that protection mechanisms saved lives and there were success stories that could be pointed to. However, the focus should be on identifying the risk factors and actual threats confronting defenders. The lack of information about the causal factors and the economic actors involved in attacks was one of the main challenges for people working to provide effective protection. In its most recent report, Global Witness had documented 179 attacks, and 23 of the attacks in Latin America had been related to mining, logging, fishery or agroindustrial activities. The criminal investigations into those cases often did not consider the role of the defenders involved or the economic interests behind the attacks but rather treated those cases simply as conflicts between private individuals. That failure placed serious limitations on the design of public prevention and protection policies. Institutional discrimination against community-based self-protection mechanisms was also a problem because those mechanisms were generally ignored and excluded from government frameworks despite their legitimacy and effectiveness. They should instead be fully integrated into national protection policies, and their valuable role and complementarity with institutional systems should be recognized.

The representative of the International Service for Human Rights said that one of the strengths of the international human rights system was the diverse range of protection mechanisms available to defenders, including special procedures with thematic mandates, the procedures of the treaty bodies and their mechanisms for protection against reprisals. Those instruments obliged States to adopt public positions on those cases and to answer for them. International mechanisms had also begun to consider extraterritorial obligations, which made it possible to examine the role of foreign companies in attacks on environmental defenders. Some of the main challenges included the excessive workload which defenders had to shoulder in order to keep track of their own cases, the fragmentation of the system and the requirement that communications had to be submitted by individuals, which made it difficult to address collective abuses. In addition, States were not under an obligation to reply, and the lack of coordination among the different mechanisms made it necessary to pursue multiple procedures concurrently, which placed a heavy burden on persons seeking protection. Communication among the international and regional systems should be strengthened in order to ensure that defenders could obtain more effective, coordinated and accessible responses.

The Designated Advocate for Collective Rights and the Environment of the Office of the Ombudsman of Colombia said that the Early Warning System of the Ombudsman's Office of Colombia was a strategic tool for the prevention of high-risk situations and the protection of environmental defenders, and the System therefore held out a great potential for contributing to the implementation of the Escazú Agreement and its Action Plan. The experience and presence on the ground of the Office of the Ombudsman, which had 42 regional offices located throughout the country, were some of its strengths. Another was the coordinated work of national, regional and community analysts who monitored the situation continuously and compiled background information on the threats that were

detected. Thanks to the trust it enjoyed in the territories, the Office of the Ombudsman was able to operate in areas where other State institutions did not venture, such as illegal mining sites and areas where armed groups were active. The Office was thus able to engage in dialogue, set up humanitarian corridors, give communities that had been silenced their voice back and help to create spaces of peace in areas where the environment had become a central issue. The institution had more than 4,000 public advocates who could provide technical assistance and legal representation and who could also work with the universities through their legal offices in order to follow up on cases. Challenges included the need to build staff capacity for implementing the Escazú Agreement and the regional Action Plan, especially in relation to the identification of environmental defenders and understanding the context of their work, the broad dissemination of the Early Warning System, the lack of a national register of threats and crimes committed against defenders and the urgent need to build a national warning system to raise an alarm about the situation of environmental defenders, taking as a basis the first warning concerning the Amazon biome that had been issued in 2024.²⁰ The main institutional challenge was to find ways of ensuring that the warnings issued by the Office of the Ombudsman would be heeded by the relevant agencies, such as the Public Prosecutor's Office, the National Protection Unit and the Ministry of the Interior, so that acts of aggression against environmental defenders would be diligently investigated, the perpetrators would be subject to effective punishments and no such acts could be committed with impunity.

The representative of the Office of the Public Prosecutor of the State of Rio Grande do Sul, in speaking of the potentials and fragilities of the Brazilian system for the protection of human rights defenders, emphasized the central role played by the jurisprudence of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and the work of the Salles Pimenta Technical Working Group, which had been created to ensure compliance with the Court's decisions. Three decisions had played a pivotal role in shaping the national protection system and contained useful elements for the development of such systems in other countries. The first was the decision in *Nogueira de Carvalho v. Brazil* (2006), which had led to the adoption of the National Protection Policy and recognized the duty of the State to facilitate, rather than interfere with, the work of defenders. The second was the judgment in *Salles Pimenta v. Brazil* (2022), which had identified structural flaws in the National Protection Programme, including the fact that it was regulated by decree rather than by law, its low level of budget execution, its uneven implementation at the subnational level, the existence of restrictive requirements for entry into the programme, the lack of parity of participation for civil society in the Deliberative Council and the use of individual, differential protection plans rather than plans based on a case risk analysis model. That decision had also led to the implementation of an investigative protocol that took into consideration the type of crime, regional specificities and gender and ethnic perspectives and to the creation of the Sales Pimenta Technical Working Group, which had been tasked with identifying the causes and circumstances surrounding the structural impunity existing in relation to violence against human rights defenders and developing courses of action for doing away with those causes, to include the implementation of a national system for compiling statistics and other data in that connection. The third was the judgment in *Muniz da Silva et al. v. Brazil* (2024), which ordered that the protection units in rural regions, high-risk areas and the Amazon were to be decentralized and reinforced and were to be staffed with trained personnel and furnished with logistical support. The judgment had also established the need to adopt a differentiated approach for defenders in rural areas and areas that were the sites of agrarian conflicts, develop rapid-response protocols that were to include temporary shelters and the use of technological tools to provide real-time emergency alerts, strengthen inter-agency coordination at the federal and state levels and undertake a targeted assessment of violations of defenders' human rights in rural areas.

²⁰ The offices of the ombudsman of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru and the Office of the Federal Prosecutor for Citizens' Rights of Brazil, whose countries belong to the Ibero-American Ombudsman Federation, issued an early warning in 2024 concerning the grave risk of violations of the right to a sound environment and ecological balance associated with the expanding deforestation of the Amazon region. See Ibero-American Ombudsman Federation (2024).

One positive development had been the proposal of a national protection plan developed by the Salles Pimenta Technical Working Group, which was currently under review in the executive branch and which covered all the various work streams.²¹ That plan represented a key step towards correcting the flaws of the current system and moving towards a more coherent, participatory and effective public policy that would be in line with the State's international obligations.

The representative of the Department of Environment of Saint Kitts and Nevis said that the greatest challenge in dealing with such cases had to do with access to justice and noted that the mechanisms for gaining access suffered, in practice, from significant economic, institutional and structural limitations. Gaining access to justice through a lawyer was extremely expensive in both financial and emotional terms owing to the complexity, duration and psychological burden involved in judicial processes. The effectiveness of laws and regulations was limited because so many of them lacked effective enforcement mechanisms. He was also concerned by the improper use of social media, which, rather than serving as a channel for reporting violations, were often used as a means of intimidating and stigmatizing defenders. Another challenge was the public's lack of familiarity with the available mechanisms and lack of knowledge about which authorities were responsible for seeing that they functioned as they should. There was an urgent need for awareness-raising campaigns on the rights enshrined in the Escazú Agreement and access procedures. Without straightforward, accessible information, the existing mechanisms were, in practice, ineffective.

3. Group discussions

The final segment of the round table was devoted to group discussions concerning the roles and contributions of the various actors in strengthening protection mechanisms. The discussions were guided by the following question: How can the Escazú Agreement, and particularly the associated instruments such as the Action Plan, be used to reinforce the protection mechanisms that have been discussed today?

The first group identified a number of shared challenges, such as the fact that existing mechanisms were not as useful as they were intended to be and the persistent lack of political will to ensure their proper implementation, civil servants' lack of sufficient training and familiarity with the content of the Agreement and the obligations that it entailed. Special emphasis was placed on gaps in the gender mainstreaming of protection measures. Mention was made, for example, of the fact that the bulletproof vests that were provided were not suitable for women and the act that women had to separate themselves from their families for their own protection. The discussion reflected a deep concern about the normalization of risk in the relevant territories, where communities were living under a constant threat. The point was also made that civil society organizations had come under direct attack, and there were increasing efforts to delegitimize their work. Those efforts had to be countered by rethinking traditional communication strategies, breaking out of closed communication circuits and reaching out to new audiences. The members of the group felt that online channels were needed so that governments could inform the public directly about progress and setbacks in the implementation of the Agreement as a way of increasing accountability.

²¹ The proposed national plan is divided into three strategic work streams: 1: State protection, with the objectives being to create a coordinated national system at the federal and subnational levels to promote justice, public security and the creation of protective social networks and to develop standardized risk analysis methodologies incorporating intersectional (gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation) approaches; 2: community-based protection focusing on the recognition and reinforcement of community and collective self-protection practices, including technical and financial support to ensure their sustainability; and 3: access to rights and the fight against impunity through the development of unified investigation and judicial protocols in line with inter-American standards, together with improved data management and technological tools for monitoring and following up on cases. The draft plan is available on the federal government's website.

The second group focused on the need to devise multilevel strategies that would encompass the roles of all the different stakeholders and address all the various levels of protection. The participants debated about the importance of linking the Escazú Agreement with other human rights systems, such as the inter-American and international systems, and with the frameworks of financial institutions. One of the main issues dealt with in the discussion was the question as to the need for better institutional coordination in order to lighten the excessive burden borne by civil society organizations when they had to document numerous cases and respond to many different mechanisms at one and the same time. The discussion also touched upon the need to generate and systematize information in such a way as to make it readily accessible and understandable for defenders who did not have the benefit of legal assistance. Doing so would involve redesigning admissibility criteria and reworking the stylistic and structural formats of the available mechanisms in order to make them more user-friendly and effective for people who were in high-risk situations.

The third group, which was made up of Caribbean representatives, discussed the wide gaps existing in documentation and in the visibility and protection of defenders. It was noted that no studies had been done on the subject in the Caribbean and that, although there had been many cases of criminalization, those cases had not been recorded in any systematic way or publicized. The role of the ombudsmen in the region was seen as a potentially valuable one, especially if lessons were learned from the Latin American experience, and the participants proposed the organization of a regional meeting of ombudsmen as an opportunity for them to coordinate their work and exchange information. The point was also made that the stories of defenders in the Caribbean had not been heard, unlike the situation in other regions, where reports and initiatives preserved their stories and their narratives and used them as tools for protection and for raising awareness.

The fourth group examined the level of trust that people had in existing protection mechanisms. They observed that, even where judicial channels, protection schemes or early warning systems existed, those mechanisms were either not implemented at all or only partially so, creating a disconnect between legal and regulatory frameworks and the reality on the ground. Given that situation, the Escazú Agreement was seen as a valuable binding instrument, especially in countries lacking specific legislation on the protection of environmental defenders. The participants also felt that self-protection mechanisms needed to be strengthened by, among other means, developing accreditation systems for defenders, devising means of heightening their institutional visibility and establishing credentialing or identification systems to support the recognition of the work they were doing. The valuable role of journalists in making such cases public was discussed, and participants noted that their role was especially influential when international news reports helped to mitigate the risks run by journalists working at the local level. The participants also felt that it was important to advocate for the adoption of emergency judicial protocols to expedite the handling of cases involving human rights defenders and for the development of mechanisms for prioritization, the greater engagement of legal clinics in such cases and the further institutionalization of protection systems by establishing stable structures, sustainable funding arrangements and sound regulatory frameworks.

G. Workshop: Access to justice: tools to investigate, prosecute and punish attacks and threats against environmental defenders

The workshop was organized by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and ECLAC, with the aim of contributing to the implementation of the Action Plan²² and

²² This is recognized by virtue of decision III/2 of the third meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean, which included among the priority areas of the Action Plan capacity-building and cooperation among the Parties and all relevant stakeholders, and thus provided for training activities and dialogue for justice officials, such as judges and prosecutors, human rights defenders, lawyers, and members of key institutions involved in the work of prevention, protection and punishment mechanisms, among others.

providing tools to enable key actors to identify and enhance good practices in investigating crimes against human rights defenders. The training was based on the report “Buenas prácticas y desafíos en la investigación de delitos cometidos contra personas defensoras de derechos humanos y periodistas”, prepared by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Mexico in 2023.

The workshop was open to all individuals, groups or organizations engaged in promoting and defending human rights in environmental matters, journalists and communicators, justice officials—such as judges and prosecutors—, lawyers, members of other national institutions crucial for the operation of mechanisms for attending to, preventing, investigating and punishing attacks against defenders, who were attending the Forum.

1. Opening session and presentation of the report “Buenas prácticas y desafíos en la investigación de delitos cometidos contra personas defensoras de derechos humanos y periodistas”

The welcome remarks and introduction to the workshop were moderated by Carlos de Miguel, Chief of the Sustainable Development and Human Settlements Division of ECLAC. Participating in the segment were Winston Anderson, Judge of the Caribbean Court of Justice, Rita Joseph-Olivetti, former Judge of the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court and member of the Committee to Support Implementation and Compliance of the Escazú Agreement, Marcelo Cousillas, Chair of the Presiding Officers of the Escazú Agreement, and Ricardo Neves, representative of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Mexico.

The Judge of the Caribbean Court of Justice gave a presentation on how the Caribbean Court of Justice had incorporated the provisions of the Escazú Agreement into its jurisprudence. Eight Caribbean countries were currently Parties to the Agreement, which had influenced the adoption of different policies and regulations on access rights in the Caribbean and had accordingly affected judicial decision-making in the region. He referred, for example, to the case of Guyana, where significant oil and natural gas deposits had been discovered. The first environmental case to reach the Caribbean Court of Justice had thus been *Gaskin v. Minister of Natural Resources of Guyana* (2024, CCJ 14).²³ The case originated from an agreement reached in 2006 between three oil companies and the Ministry of Natural Resources. The decision of the Minister of Natural Resources to issue a licence for oil exploration and production in the Stabroek block, off the coast of Guyana, had been challenged in the High Court, which had dismissed the case. On appeal, the Court ruled that the Minister had not breached the Environment Protection Act or the Petroleum (Exploration and Production) Act by granting the licence. With regard to the costs of the proceedings, the Court ruled that the appellant had acted in the public interest, which was consistent with Guyana's obligations under the Escazú Agreement, and therefore was not required to bear costs despite having lost the case. The case highlighted the importance of public interest litigation and access to justice in environmental matters.

He also referred to another important case concerning access to environmental information, *Mussington et al. v. the Antigua and Barbuda Development Control Authority*.²⁴ The case involved a judicial review challenge to a planning decision to allow the construction of a new airport on the island of Barbuda, which had been made without a proper environmental impact assessment and without public participation. A lower court had dismissed the case for lack of standing on the part of the plaintiff. However, the appellate ruling criticized the lower court's narrow approach to standing and found that the plaintiff had a concern for environmental matters, owing to his scientific knowledge of the area's flora and fauna and as a local resident. In that case, Antigua and Barbuda's existing international

²³ See Observatory on Principle 10 in Latin America and the Caribbean (n.d.-b).

²⁴ *Mussington v. Development Control Authority* [2024] UKPC 3, Privy Council Appeal No 0116 of 2021.

obligations and the fact that it had been the first country in the Caribbean to sign the Escazú Agreement, on 27 September 2018, were also taken into account. He concluded by noting that the cases demonstrated how the Agreement was guiding national standards in the Caribbean and the reasoning of courts and judges in terms of widening citizen participation and recognizing public interest litigation.

The former Judge of the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court and member of the Committee to Support Implementation and Compliance of the Escazú Agreement recalled the principle of *pro persona* established in article 3, which required the provisions of the Agreement to be interpreted in the manner most favourable to the individual, giving priority to the protection of rights and in accordance with international human rights law. She then referred to the obstacles to access to environmental justice in the Eastern Caribbean and possible measures to overcome them. For example, in Grenada the Office of the Ombudsman and the Parliamentary Commissioners offered a cost-effective option for accessing administrative mechanisms for access to justice to challenge government decisions. However, such alternatives had some shortcomings, including the fact that they were not available to private parties and could not enforce their decisions. Another difficulty was that, although courts of first instance existed in most Caribbean jurisdictions, their jurisdiction was limited, and seeking judicial remedy was costly and time-consuming. Her opinion was that the Caribbean region was not adequately fulfilling its mandate to facilitate access to environmental justice, because of issues of capacity, training and awareness among legal practitioners in environmental law. For example, a very limited number of lawyers in Grenada were devoted to environmental law. Lastly, she called for action to establish free legal aid in all Caribbean jurisdictions.

The Chair of the Presiding Officers of the Escazú Agreement referred to the main obligations contained in article 9 of the Escazú Agreement, in particular the provisions of the third paragraph, which established States' obligation to take "appropriate, effective and timely measures" to prevent, investigate and punish attacks, threats or intimidations that human rights defenders in environmental matters may suffer while exercising the rights set out in the Agreement. That could not be achieved without evidence. In that regard, the collection and preservation of evidence were fundamental to the judicial system; arguments were not sufficient, they needed to be supported by evidence that testified to the facts. Consequently, the Escazú Agreement mandated the adoption of measures to investigate and compile concrete evidence to support cases. In order to comply with that obligation in accordance with the principles of due diligence, however, steps had to be taken to strengthen the capacities of the State, its institutions and justice operators, as well as other parties involved in the process, including victims themselves and their families.

The floor was then given to the representative of OHCHR in Mexico, who gave a brief presentation of the report on good practices and challenges in the investigation of crimes committed against human rights defenders and journalists, entitled "Buenas prácticas y desafíos en la investigación de delitos cometidos contra personas defensoras de derechos humanos y periodistas", prepared by the Office in 2023. He recalled the importance of access to justice in the context of the application of article 9 of the Escazú Agreement, in particular, the investigation and punishment of attacks against human rights defenders in environmental matters.

From January 2017 to the present, OHCHR had documented at least 71 murders of journalists, 9 of media workers, and 151 of human rights defenders, possibly related to the work they were carrying out. In addition, 24 journalists, 1 media worker, and 35 human rights defenders had been forcibly disappeared during that time. Criminal investigation was crucial to ensuring the right to truth and justice for survivors, victims' families and society as a whole, but persistently high levels of impunity in Mexico were deeply concerning, as one of the main drivers of new attacks against human rights defenders and journalists. Data compiled by OHCHR showed that only 11.7% of cases of disappearances and murders had resulted in a conviction.

OHCHR in Mexico had supported numerous cases of human rights defenders and their families in their fight for justice and truth. In the process, OHCHR had observed both good and bad practices by the authorities during investigations. The report reflected part of that experience and was intended as a technical resource primarily for justice operators, as well as civil society organizations engaged in supporting and monitoring those types of investigations. The report sought to identify the shortcomings affecting the criminal investigation process, as a necessary step to propose concrete improvements to ensure that attacks against these groups would not go unpunished. It also aimed to highlight good practices to encourage their replication or adoption by justice officials and prosecutors' offices.

The report offered an in-depth analysis of the cases identified and, to that end, reviewed investigation files, conducted open-source information searches, submitted information requests to prosecutors' offices, and interviewed direct and indirect victims and their representatives, the authorities responsible for cases, and a number of other relevant actors. In that process, the Office of the High Commissioner had documented over 900 cases from 2017 to the present, focusing specifically on the crimes of disappearance and murder, as the most serious, and also threats, as the most common crime in Mexico. One of the cases selected in the report was Isidro Valdenegro López,²⁵ an Indigenous environmental defender who had been awarded the Goldman Prize for his work against illegal logging in one of the most violent areas of Mexico, the Sierra Taromara, in the north of the country. That investigation was important because it was the first case in which a conviction had been obtained for the murder of a human rights defender working on environmental issues. The lessons learned from that investigation had empowered the prosecution and enabled it to conduct other successful investigations.²⁶

The specific methodology used for the analysis of the cases and investigation files consisted of the construction of qualitative indicators based on both international due diligence standards and Mexican jurisprudence and legal instruments, including certain existing investigation protocols. Several experts in criminal law, criminology, freedom of expression and gender issues had been consulted in the development of the indicators. That had resulted in the creation of 88 qualitative indicators, each with different variables, distributed across three areas of work (guarantee of access to justice, criminal investigation techniques, and cross-cutting elements). For every case in the report, compliance with each indicator was evaluated and classified by level of fulfilment: full, adequate, partial, deficient or non-existent.

One of the report's preliminary conclusions was that, in most cases, the procedures followed had not fully complied with the principles of due diligence. However, the report did find good practices related to procedures within investigations, for example, regarding the inspection of the crime scene, the identification of witnesses and the conduct of interviews, securing of video recordings, expert analyses in various areas of forensic medicine, criminalistics and ballistics, the preparation of reports on the mechanics of the events, context analysis, and the extension of protective measures when appropriate. While those good practices did not necessarily guarantee a successful outcome in every case, they did leave lessons for the future.²⁷ The report also identified omissions in investigations, particularly in relation to compliance

²⁵ The cases mentioned were included in the annex to the report. See OHCHR (2023, annex).

²⁶ One of these was Julián Carrillo, an Indigenous rights defender also from Sierra Taromara who had been murdered in 2017. His case stood out for the comprehensive contextual analysis that had allowed investigators to understand the victim's profile, draw attention to his work as a human rights defender, and understand how this work had affected the interests of a number of groups in the area. In this case, the contextual analysis had also been key to the sentencing, because it resulted in convictions not only for the murderer and those directly involved, but also for the State for its failure to protect Julián Carrillo, his community and other human rights defenders in the area. More information on the case can be found at: Business and Human Rights Resource Centre (2018).

²⁷ For example, in the case of Arnulfo Cerón, the interviews conducted with more than 30 witnesses had led to a line of investigation based on his advocacy work, which established how this affected political and economic interests in the region. In the case of Amir Ibrahim, the prosecutor's office conducted a detailed contextual analysis of his journalistic work and the interests it touched upon, which had placed him within a social and territorial environment where crimes against the press had risen greatly. This contextual analysis formed the basis for the first conviction obtained by the Attorney General's Office for the crime of threats made against a journalist in Mexico. Lastly, in the cases of Miriam Rodríguez and Meztli Sarabia, a crucial factor had been the detectives' prompt recovery and analysis of video recordings, which had been a key step in identifying the perpetrators.

with the principles of due diligence, timeliness, competence and thoroughness. That was reflected, for example, in failures with regard to preservation of the crime scene, loss of video recordings due to unjustified delays in their identification and retrieval, failure to follow up on requests for investigative actions, failure to exhaust lines of investigation related to defence or journalistic work carried out by the victims, or related to the potential involvement of public officials.

Among its conclusions, the report highlighted the failure, in most cases, to prioritize and thoroughly follow up leads related to the human rights work carried out by the victim. Conversely, the report found that where the victim, family members or colleagues—as well as data from social media—had been treated as important sources of information, these lines of investigation had come to the fore and had significantly contributed to clarifying events. Lastly, the report offered a series of recommendations for public prosecutor's offices, one of which was a standardized protocol that was now mandatory for all 33 prosecutor's offices in Mexico, to be applied in investigations of crimes against human rights defenders.

2. Expert dialogue: Experiences of good and bad practices relating to due diligence and guarantees of access to justice in cases of attacks against human rights defenders

The dialogue was moderated by David Barrio, Legal Officer at ECLAC. Experts from various sectors shared their experiences and perspectives on good and bad practices relating to due diligence and guarantees of access to justice in cases of attacks against human rights defenders in their respective countries.

Sunil Sookraj, Chair of the Environmental Commission of Trinidad and Tobago, explained the work of that institution and its contribution to providing access to justice for environmental defenders. The Commission was a specialized tribunal for environmental matters and served as the High Court for those issues. Established by the Environmental Management Act, the Environmental Commission provided free access to environmental justice for all citizens. Cases were processed expeditiously and the Commission had staff specialized in science, engineering, medicine and other fields, supporting expert deliberations. The Commission had broad standing, enabling individuals, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations to bring cases. However, it had solely civil jurisdiction, with no jurisdiction over criminal matters. In cases of conflict resolution, Parties often managed to resolve disputes through mediation. Lastly, he highlighted the important role played by environmental defenders in these conflicts, as vital actors in environmental governance: without environmental defenders, many abuses in many countries would go unpunished.

Felipe Romero, an environmental and human rights lawyer from the Mexican Centre of Environmental Law (CEMDA), spoke about the Centre's work in documenting cases of attacks in the country. Between 2013 and 2023, it had documented 904 specific attacks and 168 homicides of human rights defenders. It had not been possible to follow up on all the attacks, as the Centre had focused primarily on lethal incidents. In that regard, its analysis had found that the context of social conflict in which crimes occurred was not taken into account. The individuals' work as human rights defenders was also overlooked, with cases being investigated simply as common crimes. In addition, investigations tended to focus on the perpetrators of crimes, not the masterminds. Another problem was that legal proceedings tended not to progress, and few convictions were achieved in cases of attacks against human rights defenders, which represented a barrier to access to justice. Another obstacle identified was distrust of public prosecutor's offices in Mexico on the part of human rights defenders and their communities, due to increasing corruption and the lack of training in those matters. Another important aspect in the cases identified was the criminalization and use of law to prosecute the work of human rights defenders in Mexico. In both 2022 and 2023, the Centre had documented 70 cases of individuals

accused of a crime because of their environmental protection work. Lastly, even in that setting and amid the high levels of impunity in Mexico, windows of opportunity existed. One of the strengths identified was the existence of institutions and policies on human rights defenders, so the challenge was to implement them effectively.

Erika Castro, Deputy Ombudsman for Collective and Environmental Rights at the Ombudsman's Office of Colombia, referred to the early warning system developed by the Office and the communication system adopted via WhatsApp chat, in order to collaborate more effectively in investigations by the Prosecutor's Office in situations of risk and threat. In the chat with the Prosecutor's Office, the Ombudsman's Office provided real-time information about what was happening in the territories. For the Ombudsman's Office, the chat was managed by researchers with a good understanding of the context and the territory, from being in constant communication with community human rights defenders. Those researchers had a presence on the ground and had won the trust of the communities. As such, they received information continuously, allowing them to analyse situations of risk in the various territories. Information would often come from community defenders, so that anyone under threat could be quickly identified, as could anyone who may have committed a crime against a human rights defender. Another practice related to clarifying criminal occurrences and motives was that, when the Ombudsman's Office received reports of threats against human rights defenders, interviews were conducted with victims, their families, or people from their community, to help to understand the role of the defender and analyse the context of the case. That provided valuable information for criminal investigations. The challenge was for all institutions to work with those processes and for the Public Prosecutor's Office to take action.

Lastly, Leonardo Menin, Public Prosecutor of the State of Rio Grande do Sul, commented on the work carried out by the Prosecutor's office in the province and reflected that many challenges remained in relation to best practices for protection and that investigation protocols were lacking for crimes against human rights defenders. That was because the idea of victim protection in the criminal process was very recent in Brazil, and so the protection of human rights defenders was underdeveloped, largely because the victim's role as a human rights and environmental defender was not identified in police investigations or judicial proceedings. Neither the police, the Public Prosecutor's Office, nor the judiciary recognized that role. Even victims did not identify as human rights and environmental defenders or recognize a causal link between attacks against them and environmental actions. A possible solution would be to disseminate information and provide training within the justice system and the police on the rights and duties regarding the protection of human rights defenders, and to set up strategies to identify the circumstances of the human rights defence context. For example, a mandatory field could be included in police reporting and complaint systems to ask the victim whether they are a human rights defender, as a kind of self-identification. In such cases, victims should also be informed of all national and international legal provisions relating to the protection of defenders. With those measures, specific lines of investigation could be better directed, complying with the principles of due diligence and the national and international legal framework.

3. Discussion groups: Due diligence indicators

Ricardo Neves of OHCHR gave a brief explanation of the indicators developed and analysed based on the cases selected in the report and emphasized that they could serve as a tool for supporting and monitoring criminal investigations. He explained that the workshop would focus specifically on five of those indicators, in order to reflect on how they were being implemented in different countries, establish what had already been achieved, what remained to accomplish, and what could be done to strengthen implementation. The indicators selected for the group activities in the workshop were:

(5) Thoroughness;²⁸ (6) Openness of justice operators to fluid communication and accountability to legal advisors and/or victims;²⁹ (34) Analysis of the facts, prior complaints, and context directly linked to the victim and other relevant actors in the process;³⁰ (37) Generation, prioritization and exhaustion of hypotheses/lines of investigation concerning journalistic work and/or human rights defence;³¹ and (85) Request by the Public Prosecutor's Office of precautionary measures or referral of victims, family members and/or other relevant parties to other protection agencies.³²

Following the presentation, group discussions were facilitated by OHCHR and ECLAC. The groups shared experiences and devised advocacy strategies around the five indicators presented, sharing shared best practices and challenges for meeting the indicators in each country and formulating specific proposals to build up capacities and achieve the indicators in criminal investigations. Lastly, the main elements and strategies agreed upon in each group were shared with the plenary.

Main conclusions:

The first group of participants from the Caribbean highlighted some progress made in access to environmental justice for individuals and groups seeking to exercise their right to information. However, there were many risks, attacks and threats, and very few protection mechanisms in place. Government agencies were not independent and were often subject to significant pressure from various interests, which generated distrust among environmental human rights defenders in relation to approaching the authorities. Lastly, they identified a significant lack of information, education and training regarding the role of human rights and environmental defenders, and noted that NGOs had a contribution to make in that regard.

The second group also referred to the Caribbean context, remarking that there was a great deal of fear, and that harassment, threats and other abuses went largely unnoticed. Many barriers existed to accessing justice and filing complaints, and the authorities and the judiciary had little understanding of who environmental defenders were and what their work entailed. As a recommendation, it was essential to provide more training to the judiciary and the police. Another recommendation was to regulate the role of environmental defenders within the national legal framework.

The third group mentioned, among the best practices shared, risk-assessed precautionary measures brought in favour of victims and their families. However, many such measures tended to be requested by national authorities, human rights commissions or the actual administrators of protection mechanisms, not judicial sources, which made them hard to implement effectively. Some of the existing measures could be inadequate in the context, such as panic buttons in remote areas. The group also referred to the urgent need for mechanisms to implement such measures within a short time frame. In the case of Costa Rica, the group referred to the intercultural approach of the measures taken with regard to threatened Indigenous communities, with the recommendation being that compliance with measures should be monitored by non-local officials in order to safeguard their independence. In Colombia, human rights defenders could contact the Ombudsman's Office directly to request

²⁸ Investigations must seek to exhaust all legal means to establish the truth. To that end, public prosecutors must examine all possible lines of investigation, different theories of direction and involvement, and exhaust all resources in order to identify the evidence.

²⁹ This means that the investigation may not be treated merely as managing private interests on the procedural initiative of the victim or their relatives. The indicator also has to do with offering victims dignified and sensitive treatment, ensuring that they and their families have access to the case file, and allowing for the presence and involvement of legal counsel.

³⁰ This means taking into account previous incidents of aggression and complaints, the community situation that may be involved, and the conflict related to the attack suffered by the human rights defender.

³¹ This means reserving a specific line of investigation for the human rights defence work carried out by the victim, analysing his or her activities, identifying the actors and interests affected by their work, creating a timeline of relevant events, and analysing contextual elements related to the victim's activities.

³² This entails identifying all victims, family members, representatives or witnesses, and whether they may face any sort of risk within the framework of the investigation, ascertaining whether they already have any sort of protection under existing mechanisms or public policies and, if necessary, connecting them with those policies or providing the necessary protection measures.

protection measures. The Ombudsman's Office acted as an intermediary, evaluated the case, and avoided risk exposure on the part of human rights defenders. Importantly, the procedure for requesting, granting and monitoring those measures should be transparent, with publicly available protocols, and the measures granted must be adapted to the specific needs and circumstances of the case and the victim. Lastly, for measures to be effective, coordination mechanisms were needed between the different national and subnational levels.

Lastly, the fourth group pointed to the lack of clear protocols for police and prosecutors in the region in the cases under review. They emphasized the importance of developing protocols, which should be made mandatory in investigations, along with evaluations and indicators to monitor compliance. They also referred to training on those instruments for justice operators, to bring the environmental defence role to the fore in investigative proceedings. Another challenge was victims' access to legal assistance, especially in the most remote areas, and the lack of prosecution offices specialized in protecting defenders. The group also emphasized the difficulties faced by victims and their families and communities in following up on criminal proceedings and accessing information. Lastly, they emphasized the need to strengthen networks of lawyers and human rights groups and institutions in a position to support those processes within the framework of the Escazú Agreement.

H. Breakout groups: Mainstreaming the gender perspective in the implementation of the Escazú Agreement

At its third meeting, the Conference of the Parties to the Escazú Agreement adopted decision III/4 on “Mainstreaming the gender perspective” in order to continue advancing gender equality in order to achieve the full and effective implementation of the Escazú Agreement”. In that decision, among other things, the Conference requested the Secretariat to prepare, with the support of the rest of the United Nations system, a guide on mainstreaming the gender perspective in the implementation of the Escazú Agreement (hereinafter, the Guide), and to present it at the next ordinary meeting of the Conference of the Parties, that is the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties in 2026. Within that framework, the Secretariat initiated a participatory and consultative process to prepare the Guide. To contribute to that effort, two breakout groups were organized, open to all attendees at the Forum. Forty people participated in the groups, which were led by moderators and facilitators.³³

The aim of the breakout groups was to compile observations and comments on a proposed annotated index for the Guide, prepared in advance by the Secretariat³⁴ (hereinafter, the Index). The document addresses the barriers faced by diverse groups of women in exercising their rights of access and in their work of environmental protection, as well as the progress and measures included in regulatory frameworks, instruments, policies, initiatives and practices aimed at reducing existing gaps in that area. That input had been developed on the basis of the outcomes of the first stage of the consultation process (conducted virtually) for the development of the Guide.

The methodology used combined presentations, participatory activities and collaborative work. First, the Escazú Agreement Secretariat gave an initial presentation showing how the structural obstacles to gender equality in Latin America and the Caribbean —such as poverty and socioeconomic inequality, discriminatory cultural patterns, the sexual division of labour and the concentration of power— are directly

³³ Irene Murillo (elected representative of the public); Luisa Sánchez (Environment and Society Colombia); Gianella Guillén (DAR Peru); Joaquín Naranjo (UN-Women); Olimpia Castillo (Environmental Education and Communication Mexico); María José Lubertino (Latin American and Caribbean Ecofeminist Network); Deirdre Shurlan (United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)); Nicole Leotaud (elected representative of the public); and Dylis Mc Donald (Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI)).

³⁴ Preliminary draft of the annotated index, available at: <https://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/events/files/propuesta-preliminar-de-indices-annotado.pdf>.

linked to the pillars of the Agreement. In a subsequent plenary session, participants shared testimonies, experiences and insights on the proposed annotated index to the Guide. Those contributions were organized into four thematic areas: process and content of the Index, current challenges, additional proposals, and next steps. Next, an exercise was conducted with thematic work stations, each focused on one of the pillars of the Agreement. At each station, the initiatives for mainstreaming the gender perspective systematized during the first stage of the consultation were presented, and participants were asked to establish priorities, offer critical analysis and propose new measures.

The day concluded with a final plenary session moderated by Joaquín Naranjo of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), in which spokespersons from each breakout group shared the insights compiled and additional contributions from the group work. The outcomes and contributions of the groups produced a strong convergence around the structural challenges of inequality that affect the exercise of access rights by women in all their diversity, Indigenous peoples, Afrodescendent communities and communities in general. Socioeconomic inequality, the concentration of power, the disproportionate burden of care work and cultural patterns significantly limited access to information, public participation and environmental justice. Those factors affected women human rights defenders in a differentiated manner, as they faced specific obstacles such as political and digital violence, criminalization, and a lack of institutional recognition and adequate protection.

The most frequent proposals included the need to ensure equitable access to information through diversified channels, adapted to rural or low-connectivity areas, using clear, inclusive and culturally appropriate language. Emphasis was also placed on the importance of strengthening the effective participation of women and vulnerable groups, promoting suitable logistics (safe spaces, accessible schedules, childcare services), and intercultural dialogue valuing ancestral knowledge. Measures were also proposed to train and raise awareness among public officials. Finally, access to justice was identified as an area of especially sharp gender gaps. A vision was proposed of comprehensive environmental justice including free legal assistance in different languages, mobile justice services, and accessible and confidential complaint mechanisms. Also suggested were measures to promote reparations with a gender perspective and to ensure funding and effective protection for women human rights defenders. Lastly, emphasis was placed on the importance of adopting intersectionality as a cross-cutting theme and genuinely including the voices of young women and of Indigenous and Afrodescendent communities, and on concrete strategies to overcome institutional resistance and ensure the effective implementation of the Agreement. The contributions compiled in the working groups are systematized in annex A3 to this report.

I. Workshop: 360 security: introduction to digital safety for individuals and groups engaged in promoting and defending human rights in environmental matters

The workshop was organized by OHCHR to provide basic knowledge on digital safety and information management to human rights defenders working on environmental issues. It also sought to raise awareness and encourage the adoption of safe practices, and to offer tools to prevent risks, manage them effectively, and protect against various forms of digital violence.

The workshop used an interactive methodology based on practical reflection, raising awareness of digital risks, and applying best practices in daily life. It also combined theoretical presentations, case studies, practical exercises and interactive activities to foster collective learning and experience-sharing

among participants. A document consisting of a toolbox for safety in the digital environment, developed by OHCHR, was also presented during the workshop and is available online.³⁵

J. Closing session

The closing session of the Forum was moderated by David Barrio, Legal Officer at ECLAC. He thanked all the participants for their valuable contributions during the sessions and referred to their important work in promoting environmental democracy. He also commended the Government of Saint Kitts and Nevis, the agencies involved and the ECLAC team for organizing the event.

Closing statements were made by Whitney Melinard, Chief Executive Officer and Communication Lead of Kopounoule Inc. and member of the Caribbean Youth Environment Network; Ariel Montoya, a member of the National Congress of Honduras and Chair of the Environment and Climate Change Committee; Gomin Camacho, Chief Executive Officer of the Ethnic Relations Commission of Guyana; Bishnu Tulsie, elected representative of the public from Saint Lucia; and Joyelle Trizia Clarke, Minister of Sustainable Development, Environment and Climate Action and Constituency Empowerment of Saint Kitts and Nevis.

The Chief Executive Officer and Communication Lead of Kopounoule Inc. and member of the Caribbean Youth Environment Network, a young Indigenous woman from the Kalinago Territory in Dominica, referred the environmental crisis in the region and in Dominica, where every year a significant part of the cultural heritage was lost owing to natural disasters and climate change. In that context, young people in Dominica and the Caribbean would be leading the fight against climate change. For that reason, it was important to focus on young people to raise awareness of their rights, taking into account the vulnerabilities of small island developing States. She concluded with a call to action, urging the full implementation of the provisions of the Escazú Agreement and a continued effort to build bridges between generations, because the collective future depended on it.

The member of the National Congress of Honduras and Chair of the Environment and Climate Change Committee said that significant progress had been made since 2022 towards ratifying the Escazú Agreement. For example, on 2 March 2022, Congress had voted to repeal the Secrecy Act under which public documents could be classified as secret, allowing environmental defenders to access public environmental information. However, much remained to be done. Honduras continued to be one of the most dangerous places for environmental defenders and journalists. Lastly, a bill—already approved by Congress and expected to be signed into law and published soon—was to reform the existing protection mechanism to include environmental defenders.

The Chief Executive Officer of the Ethnic Relations Commission of Guyana, who shared some conclusions from the Forum sessions. She drew attention to the importance of recognizing the diversity existing in the region, with a common objective: although we may be at different stages in the recognition and implementation of the articles of the Escazú Agreement, we must remain united in our commitment to its fulfilment. To that end, she stressed the need to work towards maintaining and strengthening the collaborative networks existing in the Latin American and Caribbean region.

The elected representative of the public from Saint Lucia thanked ECLAC and the Government of Saint Kitts and Nevis for organizing the Forum. He remarked that it had been four very intensive days, during which the elected representatives had taken the opportunity to network and gather ideas on how to be more effective in their roles. He thanked all the participants for their contributions and noted that

³⁵ See [online] <https://seguridad-digital.oacnudh.org/>.

the elected representatives hoped that all the input presented would contribute to the effective implementation of the Escazú Agreement. Finally, he thanked civil society for their participation despite financial constraints and concluded by reaffirming the commitment of the elected representatives to the Escazú Agreement.

The Minister of Sustainable Development, Environment and Climate Action and Constituency Empowerment of Saint Kitts and Nevis, expressed appreciation to ECLAC for choosing her country as the venue for the Third Forum on Human Rights Defenders in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean. She also expressed thanks to the Department of Environment for serving as the local focal point and for its hard work and dedication in organizing the Forum. Lastly, she thanked the panellists, speakers, moderators and attendees for their contributions, and everyone who participated in the Forum.

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Annexes

Annex A1

Implementation programme¹ for the Action Plan on Human Rights Defenders in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean

Introduction

The Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (the Escazú Agreement) is the first regional environmental treaty to be concluded in Latin America and the Caribbean and the first in the world that specifically provides for the protection of persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters (article 9).²

In order to support the implementation of article 9 of the Agreement, at the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Escazú Agreement, in 2022, the parties agreed, by decision I/6, to establish an open-ended ad hoc working group on human rights defenders in environmental matters. The main task of the group was to prepare an action plan to address this issue for presentation at the third meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Escazú Agreement for consideration and approval. The Action Plan was adopted by decision III/2 at the third meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Escazú Agreement, which was held at the headquarters of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in Santiago from 22 to 24 April 2024.

The Action Plan focuses on a set of priority areas and strategic measures to advance towards the full and effective implementation of article 9 of the Escazú Agreement up to April 2030. In order to facilitate its implementation, the parties decided to maintain the open-ended ad hoc working group on human rights defenders in environmental matters until the close of the ordinary meeting of the Conference of the Parties to be held in 2030. The working group's new mandate is to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the measures included in the Action Plan and to report to the Conference of the Parties in that regard.

Priority area D (evaluation, follow-up and review) of the Action Plan centres around the development, within the framework of the institutional architecture of the Agreement, of a programme for the implementation of the Action Plan that indicates responsibilities, deadlines and possible sources of support, among other factors.

The programme drawn up by the coordinators of the working group³ establishes specific activities or outputs for each priority area and strategic measure of the Plan, identifies the parties responsible for their implementation (including the lead actors and possible partners), the time frame for implementation (ongoing up to 2030, short term —between 2025 and 2026—, medium term —between 2027 and 2028— or long term —between 2029 and 2030) and the level of implementation (regional or national).

¹ This document was drafted by the coordinators of the open-ended ad hoc working group on human rights defenders in environmental matters in Latin America and the Caribbean of the Escazú Agreement.

² Article 9 of the Escazú Agreement provides that each Party shall guarantee a safe and enabling environment for persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters so that they are able to act free from threat, restriction and insecurity. In addition, each Party is to adopt adequate and effective measures to recognize, protect and promote the rights of such persons, groups and organizations and to adopt appropriate, effective and timely measures to prevent, investigate and punish attacks, threats or intimidations that such persons, groups and organizations may suffer while exercising the rights set out in the Agreement.

³ A proposal was drawn up based on the dialogue between the working group's coordinators and the Presiding Officers and elected representatives of the public that took place between October and December 2024. The proposal was then submitted to the parties and the public for consultation between January and March 2025; the contributions of the States Parties and members of the public were duly taken into account during the preparation of this final version of the programme.

The 2025, 2027 and 2029 forums and the 2026, 2028 and 2030 meetings of the Conference of the Parties are viewed as important milestones for the implementation of activities and outputs under the Action Plan at the regional and national levels.

The Action Plan states that: “each Party, to the extent of its ability and in accordance with its national priorities, shall: (i) seek State action at all levels (national, federal, subnational and local, as appropriate), including by the executive, legislative and judicial branches, and (ii) provide the means for national implementation within the framework set forth in article 13 of the Escazú Agreement”. This programme will therefore serve as a source of guidance for States Parties. It should be noted that when it refers to the national level, it is understood that an effort will be made to implement the measure in question at the federal, subnational and local levels, as appropriate.

In reference to sources of support for implementation efforts, the Action Plan also notes that those efforts “may benefit from contributions to the voluntary fund established in article 14 of the Escazú Agreement, and the voluntary contribution of additional resources from other sources will be encouraged”. It also states that the Secretariat of the Escazú Agreement will “encourage partnerships with various stakeholders”.

It goes on to say that: “to develop the plan, meaningful public participation will also be sought, through mechanisms such as open dialogues, especially with persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters, including Indigenous Peoples and local communities” and that special consideration will be given to persons or groups that are in vulnerable situations as defined by the Agreement. In addition, “the cross-cutting implementation of gender, intergenerational, intersectional, territorial and intercultural approaches will also be encouraged in the different priority areas and strategic measures”.

Table A1.1
Implementation programme

| Priority areas and strategic measures | Outputs and activities | Responsible parties | Time frame | Level of application |
|--|--|---|---|-----------------------|
| Area A: Knowledge creation | | | | |
| A.1. Prepare an assessment of the situation of persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters in the States Parties, which, depending on the availability of data, considers, among other factors: the number of victims or violations and the different types of violations; international and national instruments and mechanisms related to prevention, protection and punishment, such as early warning systems and protocols for action by national and subnational institutions; existing practices and other experiences and community-based initiatives and self-protection strategies carried out by those who promote and defend human rights in environmental matters. The assessment will take into account information provided by the States Parties and other key stakeholders, and will provide relevant conclusions. | (1) Design of the methodology (2) Participatory data collection mechanism (3) A regional assessment with a report presenting a summary and conclusions | <u>Lead actors:</u> The working group coordinators, the Secretariat and States Parties <u>Possible partners:</u> The United Nations system, relevant regional organizations, universities, research centres, elected representatives of the public, members of the public (especially persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters) and others will be invited to take part. | 2025–2026 | Regional |
| A.2. Ensure continuity and wider dissemination of spaces for capacity-building, exchanges and reflection on the situation of persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters in Latin America and the Caribbean. These forums for exchange will be organized periodically starting in 2025, and every two years thereafter, for the duration of the present plan, and will include recognized specialists in the subject and the support of the Secretariat of the Escazú Agreement, and the thematic areas and methodologies will be determined through a participatory process. | (1) Three regional forums (2) Preparatory activities for the forums | <u>Lead actors:</u> The working group coordinators, the Secretariat, Presiding Officers and States Parties <u>Possible partners:</u> The United Nations system, relevant regional organizations, universities and research centres, elected representatives of the public and members of the public (especially persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters) will be invited to take part. | 2025, 2027 and 2029 | Regional |
| A.3. Strengthen the content related to persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters in the Observatory on Principle 10 in Latin America and the Caribbean, as the clearing house referred to in article 12 of the Agreement, promoting the dissemination, accessibility and understanding of the Agreement, and establishing synergies and linkages with other existing repositories. The assessment referred to in action A.1 will be published in the Observatory. The States Parties shall report on new relevant legislation, policies, plans and programmes that have entered into force, in order to update the information on this subject in the Observatory. | (1) Strengthen the section of the Observatory on Principle 10 in Latin America and the Caribbean on human rights defenders in environmental matters (2) Preparation of accessible resources on the subject (3) Dissemination of State Parties' contributions (4) Publication of the regional assessment (A.1) | <u>Lead actors:</u> The Secretariat and States Parties <u>Possible partners:</u> The United Nations system, relevant regional and international organizations, universities and research centres will be invited to take part. | Activities 1, 2 and 3: ongoing to 2030 Activity 4: in 2026 | Regional and national |

| Priority areas and strategic measures | Outputs and activities | Responsible parties | Time frame | Level of application |
|---|--|--|-----------------|-----------------------|
| A.4. Disseminate the information gathered in this area, ensuring that it is accessible and understandable, in line with the standards of the Agreement. This process will take into account the problems that the public—and especially persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters—may face in terms of connectivity and the digital divide. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Activities to provide information about the assessment during its preparation, as well as its findings and updates, in various formats and on various platforms (2) Activities to provide information about the forums and to disseminate the reports on those forums (3) Information materials on the Observatory on Principle 10 in Latin America and the Caribbean (4) Information materials (minutes and other documentation) on the working group's activities | <p><u>Lead actors:</u> The working group coordinators, the Secretariat and States Parties</p> <p><u>Possible partners:</u> Elected representatives of the public, members of the public (especially persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters), other stakeholders and international organizations</p> | Ongoing to 2030 | Regional and national |
| Area B: Recognition | | | | |
| B.1. Foster exchanges and partnerships between persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters and the States Parties to advance in the recognition of their work. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Workshops and/or webinars for exchanges and dialogue among different stakeholders (2) Partnerships and collaborative efforts (3) Spaces for dialogue, networking and exchanges | <p><u>Lead actors:</u> States Parties, members of the public (especially persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters at the national and local levels) and other relevant stakeholders</p> <p><u>Possible partners:</u> The United Nations system, relevant regional and international organizations, universities and research centres, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and others will be invited to take part.</p> | Ongoing to 2030 | National |
| B.2. Regularly implement measures for dissemination, communication and raising public awareness which are adapted to the social, economic, cultural, geographical and gender characteristics of the public and which relate to the situation of human rights defenders in environmental matters and the relevance of their essential work. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) In-person or virtual seminars (2) Information campaigns and materials in various formats and on various platforms (3) Activities for raising public awareness | <p><u>Lead actors:</u> The Secretariat, working group coordinators and States Parties</p> <p><u>Possible partners:</u> The United Nations system, relevant regional and international organizations, universities and research centres, NGOs, elected representatives of the public, members of the public (especially persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters) and members of the private sector and communications media will be invited to take part.</p> | Ongoing to 2030 | Regional and national |

| Priority areas and strategic measures | Outputs and activities | Responsible parties | Time frame | Level of application |
|--|--|---|---|--------------------------------------|
| B.3. Organize activities to commemorate and recognize the work of persons, groups and organizations for their contributions to the promotion and defence of the environment, the strengthening of democracy, access rights and sustainable development, including posthumous recognition activities. As part of these activities, efforts will be made to ensure the participation of State authorities and managers, and the timely participation of those who promote and defend human rights in environmental matters, especially indigenous peoples and local communities, as well as the inclusion of persons or groups in vulnerable situations. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Participatory activities devoted to commemoration and recognition within the framework of regional meetings relating to the Agreement (2) Participatory activities devoted to commemoration and recognition at the national level | <p><u>Lead actors:</u> The Secretariat, working group coordinators, Presiding Officers and States Parties</p> <p><u>Possible partners:</u> The United Nations system, elected representatives of the public, members of the public (especially persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters), members of academia and the media will be invited to take part.</p> | At each forum (2025, 2027 and 2029) and as determined by each State Party | Regional and national |
| B.4. Forge partnerships with different stakeholders and national, regional and international forums or other bodies focused on environmental themes related to the present plan, in order to carry out activities for the recognition and promotion of the work and rights of persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters, in accordance with the rules of each one. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Promotion of activities devoted to commemoration and recognition at national, regional and international forums (2) Formation of partnerships for promoting recognition with international agencies and other stakeholders (3) Identification of stakeholders and key entities | <p><u>Lead actors:</u> The Presiding Officers, working group coordinators, the Secretariat and States Parties</p> <p><u>Possible partners:</u> The United Nations system, members of the public (especially persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters), international and regional organizations, members of the private sector and of academia, the media and other stakeholders will be invited to take part.</p> | Ongoing to 2030 | International, regional and national |
| Area C: Capacity-building and cooperation for national implementation of the action plan | | | | |
| C.1. Formulate regional guidelines which are useful for the various stakeholders and which consider the approaches and principles of the present plan, to support the national review, adaptation and formulation of laws, policies, plans and programmes, along with prevention, investigation and punishment measures, with respect to attacks, threats or intimidations that persons, groups or organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters may suffer. | Preparation, by means of a participatory process, of a document setting out regional guidelines that will take the findings and conclusions of the regional assessment into account, to be disseminated in various formats | <p><u>Lead actors:</u> The working group coordinators, the Secretariat and States Parties</p> <p><u>Possible partners:</u> The United Nations system, elected representatives of the public, international organizations, members of the public (especially persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters), universities, experts and other stakeholders will be consulted and invited to take part.</p> | 2027–2028 | Regional |
| C.2. Provide support and technical assistance to the Parties for the full and effective implementation of article 9 of the Escazú Agreement through the preparation and execution of national implementation plans and road maps, including capacity-building to assess the situation of persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters, in accordance with national needs, contexts, specificities and priorities. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) National implementation plans and road maps (2) Training for relevant civil servants and national authorities (3) Guidelines for the development of implementation plans and road maps | <p><u>Key actors:</u> The Secretariat and States Parties</p> <p><u>Possible partners:</u> International and regional organizations, financial institutions and other relevant stakeholders will be invited to take part.</p> | Ongoing to 2030 | National |

| Priority areas and strategic measures | Outputs and activities | Responsible parties | Time frame | Level of application |
|---|---|---|---|----------------------------|
| C.3. Create, foster or strengthen forums for coordination and collaboration with other bodies or existing mechanisms for the prevention, investigation and punishment of attacks, threats or intimidations that may be suffered by persons, groups or organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters, in an effort to establish synergies between States and other stakeholders for the effective implementation of article 9 of the Escazú Agreement. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Dialogues, training and exchanges among prevention and protection mechanisms and other relevant stakeholders (2) Virtual or in-person collaboration | <p><u>Lead actors:</u> The Presiding Officers, working group coordinators, the Secretariat and States Parties</p> <p><u>Possible partners:</u> The United Nations system, elected representatives of the public, members of the public (especially persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters) and international and regional agencies will be invited to take part.</p> | Ongoing to 2030 | Regional and national |
| C.4. Encourage the observance of international regulations, recommendations and guidelines on respecting and ensuring a safe and enabling environment for persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Online or in-person regional and international dialogues and other opportunities for exchanging information on good practices (2) Training activities involving the participation of experts | <p><u>Lead actors:</u> The Secretariat, working group coordinators and States Parties</p> <p><u>Possible partners:</u> The United Nations system, universities, research centres, members of the public (especially persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters) and relevant international and regional agencies will be invited to take part.</p> | Ongoing to 2030 | International and regional |
| C.5. Foster the establishment and strengthening of institutions that provide pro bono legal assistance to persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters that have been victims of crimes and human rights violations. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Sessions devoted to training and the exchange of experiences (2) Activities focused on disseminating good practices | <p><u>Lead actors:</u> The Secretariat, working group coordinators and States Parties</p> <p><u>Possible partners:</u> The United Nations system, international and regional agencies, members of the public (especially persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters), universities, legal clinics and NGOs will be invited to take part.</p> | Ongoing to 2030 and at each forum (2025, 2027 and 2029) | Regional and national |
| C.6. Conduct training activities on the Escazú Agreement, with an emphasis on specific aspects of article 9, with persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters and relevant stakeholders at the national, subnational and international levels, such as civil society organizations, journalists and social communicators, donors, private sector actors, development banks and financial institutions, international agencies, academia, governments at all levels and relevant State institutions, especially national human rights institutions and ombudspersons' offices. | Training and awareness-raising activities concerning the Escazú Agreement focusing on different audiences | <p><u>Lead actors:</u> The working group coordinators, the Secretariat and States Parties</p> <p><u>Possible partners:</u> The United Nations system, international and regional organizations, universities, NGOs and members of the public (especially persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters) will be invited to take part.</p> | As determined by each State Party and at each forum (2025, 2027 and 2029) | Regional and national |

| Priority areas and strategic measures | Outputs and activities | Responsible parties | Time frame | Level of application |
|---|---|---|---|-----------------------|
| C.7. Carry out national or regional training and awareness-raising activities aimed at justice officials, such as judges and prosecutors, and persons who are involved in processes in which the State carries out functions seeking to guarantee access to justice, such as public security and law enforcement agents or other national institutions that play a key role in the functioning of mechanisms for care, prevention, investigation and punishment with regard to attacks, threats or intimidations that may be suffered by persons, groups or organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters; also, facilitate dialogue and sharing of experiences on specific subjects among these justice officials and between them and the persons who promote and defend human rights in environmental matters. | (1) Training and awareness-raising activities for justice system and law enforcement personnel (2) Dialogues and thematic exchanges among justice system personnel and persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters | <u>Lead actors:</u> The States Parties, working group coordinators and the Secretariat <u>Possible partners:</u> The United Nations system, international and regional organizations and experts, universities, elected representatives of the public and members of the public (especially persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters) will be invited to take part. | At each forum (2025, 2027 and 2029) and as determined by each State Party | Regional and national |
| C.8. Prepare materials in different formats and languages, with clear and understandable content, and disseminate them in an accessible manner, so that they can be used to inform, provide training and raise awareness on the contents of article 9 of the Escazú Agreement. The adoption of a participatory approach in this process will be encouraged. | Development and dissemination of materials in various formats | <u>Lead actors:</u> States Parties <u>Possible partners:</u> Elected representatives of the public, members of the public (especially persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters) and international and regional organizations will be invited to take part. | Ongoing to 2030 | National |
| Area D: Evaluation, follow-up and review of the action plan | | | | |
| D.1. Support implementation, evaluation, monitoring and review of the measures of the action plan, with meaningful public participation, especially by persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters, including indigenous peoples and local communities, endeavouring to include persons or groups in vulnerable situations. | Invitation to the parties to present progress reports within the framework of the forums | <u>Lead actors:</u> States Parties, the Secretariat and working group coordinators <u>Possible partners:</u> Members of the public, especially persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters | At each forum (2025, 2027 and 2029) | National |
| D.2. Develop an implementation programme for this action plan that considers, among other factors, responsibilities, deadlines and possible sources of support. | The present document, entitled "Implementation Programme for the Action Plan on Human Rights Defenders in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean" | <u>Lead actors:</u> Working group coordinators and the Secretariat <u>Possible partners:</u> The Presiding Officers, States Parties, elected representatives of the public and members of the public (especially persons, groups and organizations that promote and defend human rights in environmental matters) | 2025 | Regional |

| Priority areas and strategic measures | Outputs and activities | Responsible parties | Time frame | Level of application |
|--|--|---|---|----------------------|
| D.3. Include in the regular reports of the Parties on the implementation of and compliance with the Escazú Agreement, within the framework established in article 15, paragraph 5(c) of the Agreement, the national measures and actions for the implementation of article 9 and those corresponding to the priority areas and strategic measures of this action plan, enabling the development of follow-up indicators. | (1) Invitation to the parties to present their regular reports, including action plans and road maps (2) Publication and dissemination of the reports | <u>Lead actors:</u> States Parties and the Secretariat | 2026 (fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties), 2028 (fifth meeting of the Conference of the Parties) and 2030 (sixth meeting of the Conference of the Parties) | National |
| D.4. Present the progress made in the implementation of the priority areas and strategic measures set forth in this action plan at the ordinary meetings of the Conference of the Parties to be held for the duration of this instrument. | (1) Reports on the implementation of the Action Plan (2) Publication of the reports | <u>Lead actors:</u> Working group coordinators, the Secretariat and States Parties <u>Possible partners:</u> Elected representatives of the public | 2026 (fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties), 2028 (fifth meeting of the Conference of the Parties) and 2030 (sixth meeting of the Conference of the Parties) | Regional |

Annex A2 Presentation of the results of the public consultation on the implementation programme

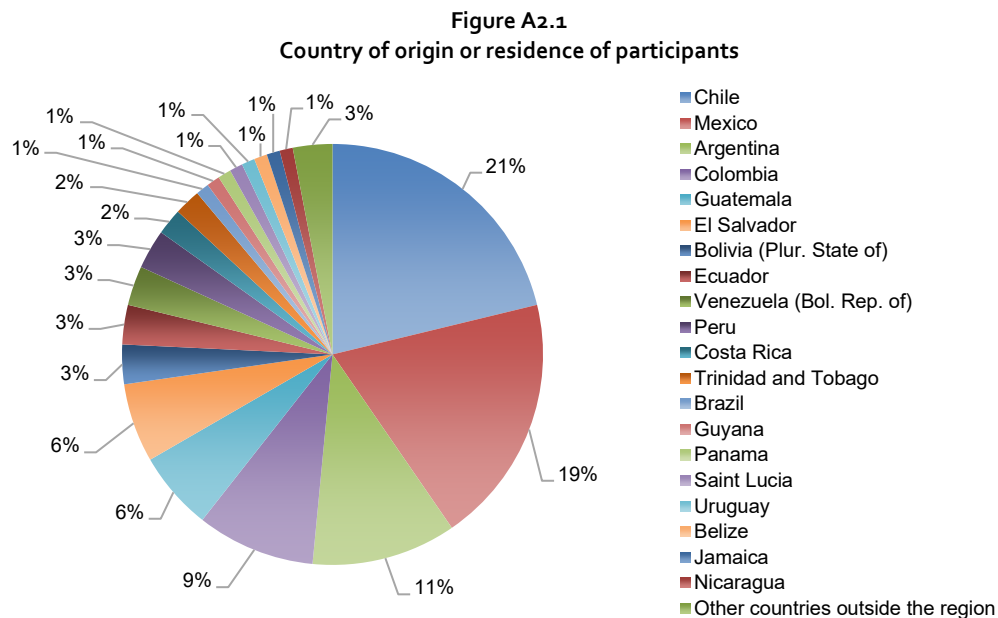
Action Plan on Human Rights Defenders in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean

(a) Introduction

With the support of the Secretariat, the coordinators of the ad hoc working group on human rights defenders in environmental matters —Chile, Ecuador and Saint Kitts and Nevis— issued a survey inviting contributions from the public with a view to developing a proposal for the implementation programme for the Action Plan, as provided in area D on evaluation, follow-up and review of the Action Plan. The survey was open on the regional public platform from 17 January to 3 March 2025 (ECLAC, n.d.).

(b) Participants

In total, 94 responses were received over the platform. Of these, 48% identified as male, 47% as female and 5% as other genders. The majority of respondents were aged between 30 and 49 years (56%), 27% were over age 50 and 13% were under age 29. By country of origin or residence, the majority of participants were from Chile (21%), Mexico (19%), Argentina (11%), Colombia (9%), Guatemala (6%), El Salvador (6%) and El Salvador (6%).



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

Regarding the capacity in which responses were given, 48.9% of participants reporting responding on an individual basis, 48.9% on behalf of an organization and 2.1% did not specify. Among the organizations participating, 71.7% were non-governmental organizations (NGOs), 8.8% were public institutions, 3% academic institutions, 3% organizations of Indigenous Peoples, 2.2% territorial organizations, and 2% other types of organizations.

(c) Results

The first enquiry concerned overall appreciation of the implementation programme. Here, 68% stated that they agreed or agreed strongly with the proposal. Some of the general suggestions received related to clearer and more specific definition of proposed activities and outcomes, inclusion of new actors and partners, use of existing information sourced from different sources and actors, participatory processes for the design of activities and products, use of different and accessible platforms for dissemination and participation, the guarantee of transparency in the presentation of information, and the establishment of stable compliance indicators.

Next, specific questions were asked regarding the implementation of each of the four areas of the action plan and their respective measures. In particular, the proposed outputs for each action plan, i.e. the specific activities or outputs, were addressed. The main contributions received for each area were as follows:

- Area A: knowledge creation
 - Regional diagnosis: conduct the methodological design and preparation in a participatory manner.
 - Forum: conduct preparatory activities.
 - Observatory on Principle 10: design accessible and interactive resources.
 - Dissemination: in different formats and over different platforms.
- Area B: recognition
 - Encourage exchanges and partnerships: through dialogue forums, network-building and interchange.
 - Awareness-raising measures: organizing dissemination seminars, campaigns and dissemination materials in different formats and over different platforms, and public sensitization activities.
 - Partnerships with different stakeholders and national, regional and international forums and other agencies to carry out recognition activities: map the main stakeholders and forums to forge partnerships to organize recognition activities and promotion with other stakeholders.
- Area C: capacity-building
 - A document of regional guidelines: prepared in a participatory manner and taking into account the results and conclusions of the regional diagnosis conducted under A.1. It was also recommended this should be disseminated in different formats.
 - Support and technical assistance to the Parties (in national implementation plans and road maps): it was suggested that training activities should be organized for relevant public officials and national authorities on the preparation of road maps.
 - Coordination and collaboration with protection mechanisms: conduct dialogues, training courses and exchanges between prevention and protection mechanisms and other relevant stakeholders, as well as creating periodic, online or in-person opportunities for collaboration.
 - Encourage the fulfilment of international guidelines: training activities with experts were suggested.

- Institutions providing free legal assistance: conduct activities to disseminate best practices.
- Training activities on the Escazú Agreement for different publics.
- Training for justice workers: dialogues and exchanges between justice officials and defenders of human rights in environmental matters.
- Area D: evaluation, follow-up and review of the Action Plan
 - Support for implementation of the Action Plan: invite Parties to present their progress at the preparatory forums for the meetings of the Conference of the Parties.
 - Regular reports to the Conference of the Parties: invite Parties to submit periodic information, including road maps and implementation plans. Publish and disseminate these reports.
 - Present the progress made in the implementation of the Action Plan at the meetings of the Conference of the Parties: publish reports on the progress of the working group.

Annex A3

Systematization of the contributions made by breakout groups on mainstreaming the gender perspective in the implementation of the Escazú Agreement

This annex presents the contributions compiled during the breakout group discussions held in the framework of the Forum and an online discussion held in parallel with the public, on mainstreaming the gender perspective in the implementation of the Escazú Agreement.

These contributions have been organized using the following themes: (i) process, approach and general contents of the annotated index; (ii) challenges and barriers faced by women in their diversity in the workplace, in the exercise of their rights of access and in protection of the environment; (iii) other possible considerations and measures to be included in the guide on mainstreaming the gender perspective in the exercise of access rights.

(i) Process, approach and general contents of the annotated index

The participants proposed that the guide should recognize the existing diversity of women; include the concept of intersectionality, in order to acknowledge that the different nature of the problems faced by women; and recognize women's cultural and linguistic identity, affording importance to different knowledge systems conversing with each other.

Second, it was suggested that reference be made to "Indigenous Peoples" and not only to "communities", as well as including Afrodescendent communities. Third, from the perspective of age, it was proposed that the guide should foster adults' interest in suggestions put forward by young people on different topics, and that young people should not be viewed as lacking the necessary experience to contribute to discussion and dialogue.

Lastly, and crucially, women's leadership should not be delinked from the grouping to which they belonged. Understanding leadership in association with a particular grouping constituted a factor of protection for women.

(ii) Challenges and barriers faced by women in their diversity in the workplace, in the exercise of their rights of access and in protection of the environment

The structural challenges of inequality, identified in the Montevideo Strategy,¹ worsen existing vulnerabilities or create new problems in the implementation of access rights and environmental protection. Respondents indicated that vulnerabilities and challenges tended to manifest in the following ways:

1. Access to environmental information
 - Women in rural areas face restrictions in accessing information.
 - Women lack financial resources to access mobile phones, the Internet, computers or mobile phone plans.

¹ The challenges are the following: (1) socioeconomic inequality and the persistence of poverty; (2) the sexual division of labour and the unfair social organization of care; (3) discriminatory, violent and patriarchal cultural patterns and the predominance of a culture of privilege; and (4) the unequal concentration of power.

- Educational gaps exist that impede the development of reading and writing skills, which affects women's ability to understand and complete forms to challenge or understand environmental information rendered in specialized language.
 - There is a lack of knowledge of environmental systems and records or how to access them.
 - Difficulties accessing places where information is shared.
 - Environmental information is made available in State offices during hours that are inaccessible to women because they coincide with schedules related to their gender roles.
2. Public participation in environmental matters
- Women are not always invited to participate in spaces where consultation takes place.
 - The timing and often excessive duration of meetings and consultations fail to consider women's availability and situations.
 - These barriers make them dependent on intermediaries, so that information does not reach them effectively.
 - The means used to disseminate information about calls for participation are not always suitable.
 - Participation mechanisms do not always ensure equitable participation of men and women.
 - The quality of participation is compromised if information is unfamiliar or presented in technical language that is hard to understand.
 - Transportation costs and travel time represent barriers, as women do not always have the means of transport or financial resources to travel to locations where participation processes are held.
 - Caregiving responsibilities reduce women's opportunities for participation.
 - Traditional norms whereby young people must obey adults hinder participation by young women.
 - Certain discriminatory attitudes among public officials discourage women's participation in public affairs.
 - Women leaders are not always acknowledged as legitimate representatives. It was even noted that many women question other women for assuming leadership positions.
 - The gap between the realities of urban and rural women must be acknowledged in order to develop differentiated and specific local strategies for effective participation by women from Indigenous and rural communities, considering factors such as violence, cultural restrictions and mobility constraints.
3. Access to justice in environmental matters
- Women in vulnerable economic situations allocate fewer resources to access justice.
 - The high costs associated with accessing legal advice or the time required to file an appeal can be prohibitive.

- The indirect costs of proceedings —such as transportation, food, lodging and document copying— can be unaffordable.
- In cases of injunctions over damage to property, specific guarantees and fees are set.
- There is a lack of awareness of the ways to lodge an appeal and avenues for accessing justice.
- The procedures and mechanisms for appeal use legal language, making them difficult to understand without technical assistance.
- Access to evidence can be limited.
- Judicial and administrative processes are often lengthy and complex, and women may lack the resources and time to follow them effectively.

4. Women human rights defenders in environmental matters

- Women human rights defenders in environmental matters are stigmatized as opposing local progress and therefore experience conflicts with their neighbours and community, and may be threatened by armed groups or even lose their jobs owing to their role as defenders.
- Gender violence, both indirect (against women's families and milieu) and direct, generates financial problems, mental health issues, risks to personal and family safety and even forced displacements to safeguard women's own lives and those of their families.
- Public officials often treat requests for information by women as merely “domestic” matters and, therefore, not important or matters of priority.
- Corruption and the lack of effective protection mechanisms discourage women's participation.
- Participation processes, information requests and legal actions all require applicants to reveal their identity, which heightens risk and vulnerability.
- Lack of access to support networks and the limited availability of legal professionals puts women at a disadvantage.
- Increased digital and political violence against women involved in environmental issues affects their work.
- It has also been observed that women who have supported bills related to women's sexual and reproductive rights are subsequently treated as lacking legitimacy when they take action to defend and protect the environment.

(iii) Other possible measures to be included in the guide

1. Measures on access to environmental information

- (a) Diversification of channels and expansion of access to information** over digital platforms, in-person service windows, toll-free telephone lines and community media such as local radio stations and social networks. It is important to provide both online and in-person options for exercising the right of access to information on environmental matters. For online options, preference should be afforded to those with the broadest reach (such as instant messaging channels), regardless of the level of technological sophistication.

- (b) **Creation of safe community information networks**, especially networks consisting of women in all their diversity, and strengthen local and community-owned media outlets in areas such as funding and training. This includes taking measures to ensure that places such as community centres have Internet access.
 - (c) **Recognition and empowerment of women in their work as transmitters and creators of important environmental information**. This also includes valuing the ancestral knowledge of women from Indigenous communities.
 - (d) **Ensuring accessibility for communities in vulnerable situations** by devising options aimed at women and communities lacking Internet access or with low levels of digital literacy, such as physical drop boxes, personalized assistance and materials in plain language.
 - (e) **Dissemination in remote territories and in multiple spaces** through partnerships with public entities, civil society organizations and advocacy groups at different levels and places frequented by women to ensure that information reaches rural and isolated communities.
 - (f) **Clear, comprehensive and inclusive language**. This includes translating and adapting technical content into formats that are accessible to different population groups, highlighting topics of particular interest to women. The use of sign language should be encouraged, and progress should be made towards including the languages of the predominant migrant population. The language used should also be culturally appropriate and geared towards recognizing the work of women in all their diversity.
 - (g) **Establish open-access training spaces on gender matters and access to information** and train facilitators and experts on gender matters and on access to information in environmental matters.
 - (h) **Sensitization campaigns**. Draw attention to the importance of access to information for being able to exercise fundamental rights such as public participation and access to environmental justice.
 - (i) **Awareness-raising among authorities and training and sensitization of public servants**. Raise awareness among decision makers about access to information as a key tool for gender equality and environmental justice, and conduct ongoing training in gender equality, cultural diversity and environmental rights, taking a rights-based and intersectional approach to ensure respectful and non-discriminatory service to the public.
 - (j) **Adopt monitoring mechanisms**. Conduct an evaluation of gender training across the State apparatus, using mechanisms that enable the impact of training on staff to be measured in order to support continuous improvement.
 - (k) **Generate statistical information on requests for access to information on environmental matters**. The statistics should include a breakdown of information requests by gender, as well as mechanisms to facilitate access to information—which should be kept up to date—on recurring topics.
2. Measures on participation in environmental matters
- (a) **Training and leadership**. Create specific programmes to strengthen leadership by women in all their diversity, affording special attention to those in vulnerable situations, such as Indigenous, Afrodescendent, campesino and rural women.
 - (b) **Capacity-building** for decision makers on the gender, intersectionality and intercultural approaches.

- (c) **Participation in environmental projects and policies.** Set up participatory processes to ensure the active inclusion of women, in all their diversity, in projects and public policies on environmental issues, as well as in budget decisions.
 - (d) **Gender-responsive monitoring.** Include gender equality indicators in mechanisms for evaluating and monitoring public policies.
 - (e) **Digital platforms and accessibility.** Set up online tools for public participation in environmental matters, ensuring that they are accessible over mobile applications, social networks, low-data-consumption videoconferencing and mobile applications available in Indigenous languages. Networks also need to be set up in rural and Indigenous communities, to enable the use of these platforms.
 - (f) **Enabling and respectful conditions for participation.** Adopt practices such as selecting accessible venues and times, considering cultural and linguistic identity, gender, age and work and caregiving responsibilities.
 - (g) **Safe spaces and logistical support.** Adopt practices aimed at ensuring violence-free environments for women's participation, offering childcare services and logistical support to facilitate their attendance.
 - (h) **Ensure that spaces are accessible to persons with disabilities** and that training/learning mechanisms take all types of disabilities into account, particularly visual and hearing impairments.
 - (i) **Promote training for women, in all their diversity,** through personalized tutoring, mentoring and counselling to facilitate effective participation in international settings.
3. Measures on access to justice in environmental matters
- (a) **Review and updating of regulations.** Harmonize of laws and judicial procedures to include a gender perspective.
 - (b) **Assessments of barriers to environmental justice for women.** Analyse and identify recurring patterns and obstacles that impede or hinder effective access to justice in environmental matters for women in all their diversity.
 - (c) **Differentiated service protocols.** Devise specific mechanisms for cases in which women face structural barriers, taking into account their diversity (including Indigenous women, Afrodescendent women, rural women and women with disabilities). Protocols must directly address structural gender inequalities and consider the particular situation of women environmental human rights defenders. In addition, differentiated service protocols must address not only the initiation of the process but also the run-up to filing a formal complaint and monitoring throughout all stages, recognizing the asymmetries that women face in environmental proceedings.
 - (d) **Dissemination and implementation of training mechanisms within judicial protocols.** Establish specific training programmes on the differentiated care protocols put in place. In addition to promoting the application of the protocols, these programmes should aim to make legal language more accessible to female users in all their diversity.
 - (e) **Free access to justice.** Adopt mechanisms to ensure that women in vulnerable situations, especially in rural and Indigenous areas, can access legal processes in environmental matters free of charge. Free access should also be envisaged for particularly serious cases requiring urgent intervention.

- (f) **Legal support funds and free legal and technical assistance.** Provide financial assistance to cover legal representation, expert technical reports and other expenses arising from the defence of environmental rights, prioritizing women affected by environmental conflicts.
 - (g) **Streamlining of procedures.** Adopt practices to reduce administrative requirements that hinder women's access to justice, ending unnecessary bureaucratic barriers.
 - (h) **Accessible reporting mechanisms.** Put in place secure, confidential reporting channels adapted to different cultural and territorial contexts, ensuring availability in multiple languages and in various locations. These should be linked to training on rights and procedures and actively promoted. Mechanisms including mobile legal services able to reach remote areas are recommended.
 - (i) **Training within the judicial system.** Initiate ongoing education initiatives for judges and officials on gender equality and its link to access to justice and environmental protection. Training should reach all territorial levels and focus on those bodies that have the greatest contact with women and have decision making powers.
 - (j) **Transparency, access to information and clear language.** Publish clear and accessible information on judicial and administrative processes, ensuring that women in all their diversity can track their cases. The information published must include accessibility criteria, readability, language diversity and data disaggregation.
 - (k) **New, more comprehensive mechanisms for urgent judicial protection and comprehensive reparation** in cases of gender violence linked to environmental issues.
4. Measures on women human rights defenders in environmental matters
- (a) **Visibility and recognition.** Document and disseminate the stories of women human rights defenders in environmental matters, highlighting their role in protecting territory and natural resources by means of public campaigns and instances for political, social and community recognition, as well as through specific awards for women human rights defenders in environmental matters.
 - (b) **Comprehensive protection programmes designed with women human rights defenders,** so that they properly address the needs of these women and their communities and movements.
 - (c) **Support and protection.** Adapt measures to their contexts, including protection for families, access to safe shelters, and support in cases of gender-based violence in both private and public settings.
 - (d) **Protection mechanisms.** These must aim to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of women human rights defenders. Prior consent of the defender must be obtained, specifying the use that is to be made of the information collected. Any forms associated with the process should include a variety of options for identifying the individual.
 - (e) **Rapid and effective institutional response.** Adopt comprehensive protocols to ensure that public bodies, judicial institutions and security forces act diligently and humanely in response to threats, attacks or criminalization of women human rights defenders in environmental matters, ensuring that revictimization is avoided.
 - (f) **Training of authorities.** Put gender-sensitive training in place for public officials, public defenders, justice system personnel and security forces involved in the protection and support of women human rights defenders in environmental matters.

- (g) **Support and coordination networks.** Support and strengthen local, national and regional networks of women environmental defenders, and fortify relationships and interchanges between international organizations and women human rights defenders in environmental matters and their communities, to build up their capacity to respond to threats.
- (h) **Strategic alliances.** Coordinated efforts should be made by governments, international organizations, civil society and Indigenous and rural communities to ensure their protection and recognition.
- (i) **Access to financing.** Promote resources and funding for initiatives led by women human rights defenders in environmental matters, to foster their autonomy and empowerment. Provide support and guidance for completing the necessary related paperwork.
- (j) **Specific protection and refuge policies for women human rights defenders who have been exiled, removed from their land or temporarily displaced,** including the issuance of special visas or special immigration status.
- (k) **Academic training and professional networks.** Include environmental advocacy in university curricula and strengthen collaboration with existing networks of environmental prosecutors and defenders in the region, as a strategy for providing institutional support to women human rights defenders.
- (l) **Investigation and punishment of violence.** Implement effective mechanisms to report, investigate and punish acts of intimidation, criminalization and violence against women human rights defenders in environmental matters.



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