

Working Towards a Sustainable Future

The world watches as leaders meet in Paris from November 30 - December 11, 2015 for the 21st Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the 11th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP) in Paris, France. Considering one of the world's most disastrous phenomenon, climate change and the detrimental impacts that are expected to emerge or have already surfaced such as rising sea levels, increased incidences and intensity of natural disasters, decreased food production capabilities and health impacts among others, many anticipate that COP 21 must culminate with a legally binding agreement that will enable mankind to have a sustainable future.



Another important process aimed at ensuring a sustainable future took place less than a month ago in Panama. From October 27th - 29th, negotiators from twenty signatory countries of the Latin American and Caribbean Declaration on the application of Principle 10 (LAC P10) gathered for the Second Meeting of the Negotiating Committee of Principle 10. This meeting was historical as it marked the

commencement of a critical phase – the NEGOTIATION of a regional agreement to set higher standards for decision making processes regarding environmental matters in LAC. In her address to the opening session Ms. Patricia Madrigal, Vice-Minister of Environment of Costa Rica emphasized that, access rights are the best basis for democratic societies and the 20 States which are signatories of the Declaration have shown a strong commitment to move towards a regional agreement. These negotiations need to be proactive, constructive, transparent and open, especially so that it exceeds expectations at the international level.

Despite this valuable assertion, the negotiations progressed rather slowly as delegates engaged in discussions on the Preamble and Articles 1 and 2 of the Preliminary Document of the regional agreement. The slow pace of the meeting could be attributed to three Latin American countries who indicated that time did not permit them to engage in national consultations on the Preliminary Document and although they would participate in the discussions and not oppose the consensus that was achieved, they could not be part of the negotiations.

Nonetheless, civil society representatives at the meeting were pleased that many other countries were successful in engaging their citizens in the review of the Preliminary Document (the Preamble and Articles 1 - 10) and submitted these in a timely manner to the technical secretariat for the process, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) by the August 31st deadline. Special mention must be made of Chile and Peru that conducted face to face consultations with highly participatory standards in various cities in their respective countries. Additionally, several countries like Uruguay, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Panama, and Chile amongst others must be congratulated for announcing the importance of attaining a legally binding agreement by December 2016 when these ambitious negotiations are expected to culminate.



Centre: Danielle Andrade – Goffe, Elected Main Representative of the Public and Environmental Law Consultant

The LAC P10 process is known for its inclusive nature, this is primarily because the public has been involved in this participatory process from the onset. Five of the six elected Representatives of the Public were present as well as three independent experts, along with 30 civil society organizations from 18 countries. In her address at the opening ceremony, Ms. Danielle Andrade Goffe, one of the elected Main Representatives of the Public said, “Having a binding instrument on access rights will allow the region to advance the implementation of the Post-2015 Agenda,

and particularly the future Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which many governments have already committed to”. Furthermore, she said, “This unique opportunity reflected in the document on one hand incorporates the best legislation in the region in the area of access rights and on the other hand looks to the future to establish capacity building partnerships and mechanisms that will allow us to face the challenges for the better implementation of access rights”.

Although the meeting did not achieve everything it intended to, the coordination by the government of Panama as well as the continued facilitation by ECLAC must be commended. The elected Representatives of the Public pledged their continued support to the process and encouraged signatory countries to carry out the requisite consultations needed to ensure that the 3rd meeting of the Negotiating Committee scheduled for April 2016 in Punta del Este, Uruguay progresses at a much faster pace because there is much work to be done if the region is truly serious about advancing environmental governance. Additionally, non-signatories like Saint Lucia and many other Caribbean countries have an equally important role to play, as they are urged to sign on to the instrument before the next meeting. That way they can actively participate in the negotiation of a regional instrument geared at setting higher standards to improve how our rich yet fragile environment is protected for the benefit of present and future generations and not just a selected few.

For more information on the LAC P10 process please contact the Elected Representatives:
http://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/pages/files/tabla_representantes_del_publico_eng.pdf.

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