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THE DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL

**Draft Remarks at the Opening ceremony of the Fourth
meeting of the Forum of the countries of Latin America and
the Caribbean for Sustainable Development**

16 March 2021, 10:00 NY time

President Alvarado, Honorable Ministers, President of ECOSOC, Excellencies, Dear Colleagues and friends,

It is an honor to address the opening session of the fourth meeting of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development.

I thank His Excellency President Carlos Alvarado of Costa Rica for hosting this meeting, and I commend Executive Secretary Alicia Bárcena for convening this critical Forum.

We meet at a time when the COVID-19 crisis continues to test every country in the world. The people and economies of Latin America and the Caribbean have been hit particularly hard. With only 8.4 per cent of global population, the region has reported 27.8 per cent of global COVID-19 deaths –more than 700,000 to date.

The pandemic also threatens to generate another “lost decade” of development progress in the region, undermining our collective plans to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals.

The crisis is expected to produce the worst economic contraction in the history of the region, adding to structural gaps including stark inequalities, low productivity, high unemployment rates, and weak social protection systems.

Those in rural areas, indigenous people, afrodescendants, migrants, refugees and youth, who were already at a disadvantage before the crisis, are seeing their prospects further hampered.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also erased decades of progress towards gender equality.

But we have we also seen countries across the region implementing rapid responses through unprecedented fiscal

and social measures. These efforts have saved millions of lives and prevented many from falling into poverty.

And today there remains much we can do to stave off further damage and use the recovery to reignite the Sustainable Development Goals.

Looking ahead, I see five key areas for action.

First, I want to reiterate the call of the Secretary-General for COVID-19 vaccines to be a global public good, available to everyone, everywhere.

The COVAX facility is our vehicle for facilitating equitable access, but we are many months away from having sufficient doses to achieve adequate coverage.

Global manufacturing of vaccines must be at least doubled, and the COVAX facility must be fully funded through global and regional solidarity. This requires sharing excess doses through COVAX, and a greater sharing of

technology and know-how with manufacturers around the world, particularly in the LAC region, which does have this capacity.

This is a matter of fairness and self-interest.

Second, financing is critical. The global community must fully support middle-income countries and small island developing states, where debt and climate change vulnerability are closely linked.

As part of the Financing for Development in the Era of COVID-19 and Beyond initiative, the Secretary-General is urging an expansion of the G20 Debt Service Suspension Initiative and the Common Framework for Debt Treatment.

Innovative mechanisms such as the Fund to alleviate COVID-19 economics proposed by the Government of Costa Rica; the Debt for Climate swap initiative and the Caribbean resilience Fund should also receive institutional support.

Third, making peace with nature.

The United Nations has proposed a blueprint to align policies on COVID-19 and climate-action. We need a transformative recovery encompassing key sectors such as renewable energy, sustainable mobility and tourism, digitalization, health-care manufacturing, the bioeconomy and the circular economy.

Fourth, we need to build an equal future where women can take their rightful place in society.

Excellencies,

Upcoming international conferences offer opportunities to help shape our common future, including the Generation Equality Forum – with its first meeting in Mexico from 29 to 31 March; the High-Level Political Forum in July; the Food System Summit and High-Level Dialogue on Energy in September; and COP15 on biodiversity and COP 26 on climate in the final part of the year.

Latin America and the Caribbean has much to offer to these global convenings.

This is the region that has helped birth the Sustainable Development Goals.

The challenges of today require this type of bold leadership.

Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean can help the world anchor the recovery from COVID-19 in the longer-term promises of the 2030 Agenda.

This year, eleven countries of this region will also present their Voluntary National Reviews on the SDGs.

I encourage them to use these reviews as an opportunity to raise ambition and engage an even broader spectrum of stakeholders to expand ownership of the 2030 Agenda.

In September, the Secretary-General will also convene the annual SDG Moment and we encourage those conducting

Voluntary National Reviews to attend with clear plans for leveraging the recovery to get the goals back on track.

Fifth, let's make the most of the repositioning of the regional UN development system, which has put us on much stronger footing to support Member States.

Our reforms started to bear fruit in 2020 in support of response and recovery efforts. In 2021, we must continue deploying the full potential, know-how and policy expertise of our regional assets in support of countries and UN Country Teams.

Excellencies,

The challenges ahead are significant, but Latin America and the Caribbean has the capacity to drive transformative change over the next ten years.

The United Nations will remain your steadfast partner at this pivotal moment in building a better future for all.

Thank you.

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