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Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development

Input on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Latin America and the Caribbean

Note by the Secretariat

The Secretariat hereby transmits the input from the fourth meeting of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development, held from 15 to 18 March 2021, to the high-level political forum on sustainable development.



Input on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Latin America and the Caribbean

Summary

The fourth meeting of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development was held from 15 to 18 March 2021, in virtual format owing to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, and was convened under the auspices of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and chaired by the Government of Costa Rica. It was open to member States of the Forum, associate members of ECLAC, observers, the funds, programmes and specialized agencies of the United Nations system, United Nations resident coordinators, regional and subregional intergovernmental organizations, international financial institutions, academia, the private sector and civil society.

The main topics addressed during the meeting were the promotion of a resilient and sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; the false dichotomy between health and the economy; crisis, recovery and transformation in the decade of action for the Sustainable Development Goals; financing for development; and building an inclusive and effective pathway towards achieving the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and post-pandemic recovery from COVID-19. The meeting also featured some innovative initiatives. The first such initiative was the further elaboration of the ECLAC Caribbean First strategy; all Caribbean member countries participated in the meeting, which included a specific panel that addressed critical issues to keep the 2030 Agenda in sight so as to build forward better in the subregion in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the first ever high-level meeting on the challenges faced by the associate members of ECLAC in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda was held in advance of the Forum meeting. The second initiative was the strengthening of the role of civil society, whose participation in all panels was welcomed by member States; in addition, a meeting was organized in advance of the Forum meeting by the mechanism for the participation of civil society in the Forum. The third initiative related to the contribution of the United Nations system, with presentations on the progress made in the operationalization of United Nations reforms by the Executive Secretary of ECLAC and the Regional Director of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for Latin America and the Caribbean in their capacity as Vice-Chairs of the newly established Regional Collaborative Platform for Latin America and the Caribbean.

The present report is based on the summary of the Chair of the fourth meeting of the Forum.

I. Introduction

1. The fourth meeting of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development was held from 15 to 18 March 2021, in virtual format owing to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, and was convened under the auspices of ECLAC and chaired by the Government of Costa Rica. It was open to member States of the Forum, associate members of ECLAC, observers, the funds, programmes and specialized agencies of the United Nations system, United Nations resident coordinators, regional and subregional intergovernmental organizations, international financial institutions, academia, the private sector and civil society. Participation in the meeting by all relevant stakeholders was high: there were 3,400 remote participants and 6,200 people followed the Forum through social media.

2. Preparatory activities for the fourth meeting of the Forum included the first ever high-level meeting on the challenges faced by the 14 associate members of ECLAC in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; a meeting for representatives of civil society; a meeting of the Sustainable Development Goals business forum on public and private sector strategies for a sustainable and inclusive recovery; a regional workshop on voluntary national reviews, organized by ECLAC in collaboration with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs; and the annual meeting convened by the Deputy Secretary-General in her capacity as Chair of the Regional Collaborative Platform for Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as her meeting with all United Nations resident coordinators in the region. In addition, more than 30 side events were held, 2 of which were organized by the Office of the President of Costa Rica, on the themes “Women and nature: financial solutions for an inclusive and equitable economic recovery” and “The environmental big push for sustainable, inclusive and resilient recovery”.

3. At the opening session, moderated by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Worship a.i. of Costa Rica, statements were made by the Deputy Secretary-General; the President of the Economic and Social Council and Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations in New York; the Executive Secretary of ECLAC; and the President of Costa Rica.

4. The Deputy Secretary-General noted that the Latin America and Caribbean region had been particularly affected by the COVID-19 crisis and faced the worst economic contraction in its history, potentially erasing the progress made towards equality, and especially gender equality. Countries’ rapid responses through unprecedented fiscal and social measures had saved millions of lives and prevented an increase in poverty. However, there were five key areas for action: (a) ensuring that COVID-19 vaccines became a global public good, especially through the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility, which should be given full support; (b) providing institutional support for financing for development – critical for middle-income countries and small island developing States, where debt and vulnerability to climate change were linked – and the proposals for debt service suspension, the fund to alleviate COVID-19 economics proposed by Costa Rica, the Debt for Climate Adaptation Swap initiative and the proposed establishment of a Caribbean resilience fund; (c) aligning policies on COVID-19 and climate action to promote renewable energy, sustainable mobility and tourism, digitalization, health-care manufacturing, the bioeconomy and the circular economy; (d) building an equal future, where women could take their rightful place in society; and (e) making the most of the repositioning of the regional United Nations development system. Upcoming international conferences such as the high-level political forum on sustainable development offered opportunities to help to shape a common future, and Latin America and the Caribbean had much to offer as countries that could help the

world to anchor the recovery from COVID-19 in the longer-term promises of the 2030 Agenda. The challenges ahead were significant, but the region had the capacity to drive transformative change over the coming 10 years. The United Nations would remain a steadfast partner at such a pivotal moment in building a better future for all.

5. The President of the Economic and Social Council said that the world was at a turning point and the first order of business must be equality in the distribution of, and access to, vaccines. To respond to, and recover from, the pandemic, the international community must mobilize the financing required by developing countries. In the Economic and Social Council, there was emerging agreement on the actions needed. The first was debt relief: the Group of 20 Debt Service Suspension Initiative was welcome, but should be expanded and extended until the end of the COVID-19 crisis. The private sector, which held most of the debt of the Latin American and Caribbean Group, should be brought into the debt suspension exercise, which should be utilized to restructure debt on a case-by-case basis. An architecture for sustainable debt management must also be built. Second, least developed and middle-income countries required additional liquidity to invest in recovery. Developed countries had injected more than \$14 trillion into their economies but developing countries did not have access to reserve currency to create such liquidity. The creation of new special drawing rights by the International Monetary Fund and the redistribution of developed countries' unutilized quotas to developing countries would be critical. The Secretary of the Treasury of the United States of America had recently recommended the creation of 500 billion new special drawing rights, which could generate \$56 billion in new money for the region. The fund to alleviate COVID-19 economics initiative proposed by Costa Rica could also provide significant avenues for developing countries to overcome the liquidity crisis and build back sustainably, and it was hoped that it would be adopted by international financial institutions. The Economic Commission for Africa proposal for the establishment of a liquidity and sustainability facility deserved international support. Third, much more concessional financing must be mobilized for the countries most in need, given that the poorest could not afford to take on new debt. Under the eighteenth replenishment of International Development Association resources, \$30 billion had been allocated for concessional financing and that figure must be at least doubled. Donor countries must finally fulfil their promise to provide 0.7 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) as official development assistance. Regional and subregional financial institutions should increase capitalization and adopt more flexible lending criteria. Illicit flows of funds from poor countries must be stopped and the climate finance pledge of \$100 billion annually must be honoured; the 14 recommendations of the High-Level Panel on International Financial Accountability, Transparency and Integrity for Achieving the 2030 Agenda should be endorsed and implemented; and investment in sustainable infrastructure was needed to prevent a climate catastrophe. The creation of a public-private facility for sustainable infrastructure investment under the auspices of the United Nations had been proposed to help developing countries to bridge the existing infrastructure investment gap. Systemic inequalities must be addressed and Latin American and Caribbean countries and ECLAC had a vital role to play in promoting the transition to a more equal, dynamic and prosperous world.

6. The Executive Secretary of ECLAC said that, amid the health crisis, the value of the Forum was clear, establishing it as a vital space for sharing the lessons learned and challenges faced during the pandemic and action taken by countries to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as for providing input for the next high-level political forum on sustainable development. The meeting was taking place during a crisis that had deepened the structural problems and revealed the unsustainability of the region's development model. The pandemic had caused in 2020 the sharpest economic contraction in 120 years, increasing unemployment and

labour informality, poverty and extreme poverty, and had had disproportionate effects on rural areas, women, children and young people, indigenous peoples, people of African descent and migrants. Among the most notable effects of the crisis was the substantial number of women who had exited the labour market, owing, in part, to rising demand for care in the home, setting back more than a decade of progress. The crisis had also revealed deep digital divides, with 46 per cent of children having no access to tele-education. Against that background, there was a renewed call to move towards a care society with universal social protection, which would represent a major civilizational change, and to establish a basic digital basket in the countries of the region, to which 1 per cent of GDP would be allocated. The situation was a wake-up call as to the dangers of not achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda. In the framework of the decade of action for the Goals, it was highlighted that the region must focus on strategic sectors to move towards sustainable development, and that international financing was crucial. In that regard, the fund to alleviate COVID-19 economics initiative was of particular relevance because it would provide concessional loans regardless of countries' income levels and without conditions. The response to the crisis must be accompanied by the course-correcting actions needed to achieve sustainable development. Greater democracy was also a must, but nothing would be achieved without access to vaccines, which called for changes in intellectual property and patent regulations, collective action and a multilateral approach, based on public goods to close the broad gaps.

7. The President of Costa Rica said that the world had changed since the drafting of the Sustainable Development Goals, and the comprehensive nature of the 2030 Agenda was at risk. The pandemic had revealed the wide gaps in the region. High indebtedness and limited fiscal space restricted the capacity to respond adequately to the crisis, and in the case of the Caribbean and Central America, there were also pre-existing vulnerabilities, such as those linked to climate change. Given the urgent need to speed up recovery, the capacity to invest in the future, in sustainable solutions and in the most vulnerable was imperative, avoiding the temptation to pursue recovery at all costs. The pandemic must be taken as a warning sign about humanity's pressure on ecosystems. The current production and consumption systems had reached their limit, placing the world at a crossroads that demanded a structural change in the development model to ensure a safe and healthy home for current and future generations. The "new normal" must be truly new. Nationally determined contributions must be updated, investments redirected towards carbon neutrality and a common front formed to mobilize the resources needed to support countries to implement the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement. Amid the tensions that the global governance architecture now faced, the value of multilateralism could not be overemphasized. Solidarity and international cooperation were the only real way out of the crisis. Latin America and the Caribbean must speak with a strong and united voice to reshape the world order for the better. Regional consensus already existed, as expressed in the political declaration on a sustainable, inclusive and resilient recovery in Latin America and the Caribbean adopted at the thirty-eighth session of ECLAC and the conclusions and recommendations expected to be adopted at the fourth meeting of the Forum, and the region should put forward its proposals in all global discussions, in particular at the high-level political forum on sustainable development and the 2021 Economic and Social Council forum on financing for development follow-up.

II. Presentation of the publication *Building Forward Better: Action to Strengthen the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, fourth report on regional progress and challenges in relation to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Latin America and the Caribbean

8. The publication, *Building Forward Better: Action to Strengthen the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, fourth report on regional progress and challenges in relation to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, presented by the Executive Secretary of ECLAC, highlighted that, in a world in crisis, with slow growth, inequality and an environmental emergency, the unprecedented health crisis was exacerbated by the inequality matrix. The region was facing the pandemic amid serious existing structural problems, compounded by geopolitical constraints in the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines. All that increased the possibility that the Goals of the 2030 Agenda would not be achieved and put their comprehensiveness at risk. All the trends described in the report showed that only a third of Sustainable Development Goal targets were on course to be met. On a positive note, almost all countries had mechanisms in place for the implementation of and follow-up to the 2030 Agenda. The countries of the region had taken ownership of the 2030 Agenda and national and local voluntary reviews were on the rise: worldwide, a third of the countries that would be presenting reviews for the third time in 2021 were from the region, and 28 of the 33 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean would have submitted their reports to the high-level political forum on sustainable development between 2016 and 2021.

9. The strategy for a decade of action for the Sustainable Development Goals had to be realistic, build on progress, acknowledge the challenges of implementation and be aligned with a transformative recovery. ECLAC had proposed a strategy for action: a big push for sustainability based on the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Goals, endorsed by all member States of ECLAC during the thirty-eighth session of the Commission, held in October 2020. It had put forward sectors for a new development pattern: the energy transition to non-conventional renewable sources; sustainable mobility and urban space; the digital revolution and universalization of access; the health-care manufacturing industry; the bioeconomy, biological resources and natural ecosystems; valuing and expansion of the care economy; the circular economy; and sustainable tourism. This selection of sectors was intended to serve as a guide on the basis of which each country, in accordance with its characteristics and priorities, could determine the activities it wished to concentrate on, the combinations between them, the approach taken to implementing development policies and the way in which other areas were incorporated into the model of progressive structural change needed to build forward better. It was therefore necessary to foster new engines of growth with redistributive results and overcome the gaps and the trap affecting middle-income countries. Progressive taxation was needed, as well as the closure of technological and investment gaps, taking into account data protection and cybersecurity, changing the conversation with civil society and the private sector, and moving from indifference to solidarity.

10. In the session dedicated to comments on the report, it was noted that the report outlined an integrative approach to the multiple facets of the crisis, along with a set of proposals for action based on analysis and statistical projections. The serious economic, social and environmental consequences of the crisis highlighted the urgency of a transformation of production and consumption patterns. The recovery had to be transformative and the new reality had to be sustainable, inclusive,

innovative, green and decarbonized. The title of the report made reference to “building forward better”, which gave it a positive spin, and the mention of “action” was also critical because it was important to produce a report that led to action to achieve the 2030 Agenda. The report was a valuable contribution to the Global Sustainable Development Report being prepared for launch in 2023, because it was data-based and highlighted how the impact of the COVID-19 crisis had added to existing structural problems in Latin America and the Caribbean, presenting further economic, social and environmental obstacles to the achievement of sustainable development and causing another decade to be lost. It highlighted how the 2030 Agenda led the region in a growth direction based on environmental sustainability and equality, which was different from the existing path. Equality was of the utmost importance for environmental sustainability and for tackling the challenges of climate change. Women were on the front line of the crisis and were the hardest hit. The report brought together information that provided a good overview of how countries were coping with the situation. Availability of vaccinations was a new dimension of inequality and joint vaccine production in the region was a very important area of opportunity.

11. It was also mentioned that ECLAC was a very valuable resource in Latin America and the Caribbean and its history and thinking had positioned it as a global interlocutor. Given the crisis, it had to be borne in mind that the world had changed and there was no longer any way to return to the previous reality: there was nowhere to go back to. Global governance was at a juncture where it was not clear whether there was a change in global hegemony or whether there was any possibility of building democratic multilateral governance. There was a deterioration in the tools of global governance. One example of this was the process of production and distribution of vaccines. The value of the work of ECLAC was that it had incorporated new elements into the traditional discourse, and although it was an economic commission, it had successfully mainstreamed a holistic and interdisciplinary approach. The report presented to the Forum addressed the problems of today’s world: the transformation of the world of work, automation and the difficulty of maintaining welfare systems, which were consolidated in developed countries and largely not consolidated in countries of the region. The pandemic had made transformative recovery a key concept.

12. The report also referred to restructuring of the United Nations development system in the region, seeking synergies and cooperation among the agencies, funds and programmes of the system. The system also needed to be present at the local level, together with non-governmental organizations and research groups, for its work to have a real impact on the ground. The report also highlighted the need for greater regional integration, particularly in the post-COVID-19 recovery phase.

III. Dialogue on a resilient and sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

13. During the dialogue, moderated by the Minister of National Planning and Economic Policy of Costa Rica, the countries reaffirmed their commitment to the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, which served as a guide for addressing the needs arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2030 Agenda had enabled countries to make significant progress on the social, economic and environmental fronts, but the pandemic had deleterious consequences with regard to health, education, unemployment, poverty and food security and exposed existing gaps. In the response to the pandemic and its effects, social protection was prioritized

in addition to health. It was necessary to rebuild with equality and sustainability and build resilience while revitalizing the regional response to the pandemic, especially regarding equitable access to vaccines. The countries reaffirmed that multilateralism was the cornerstone of sustainable development and was crucial for tackling challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Countries must show greater commitment, responsibility, empathy and solidarity.

14. Delegations welcomed the document presented by ECLAC and appreciated its timely recommendations for the region's recovery. The importance of the concept of development in transition was stressed, given that the classification of countries determined on the basis of GDP was not a multidimensional approach. Several countries highlighted the importance of local adaptation of the Sustainable Development Goals as a way to focus efforts on the most critical areas and highlighted their progress in terms of environmental policies and climate change response, in particular energy transition initiatives. Public-private partnerships were important, as was the involvement of business sectors, trade unions and civil society organizations. A collective response and a new social compact were needed to confront the current and future pandemics. Countries called for cooperation and solidarity, with multilateralism as the cornerstone and a people-centred approach. They also recalled the objectionable undermining of the funding and structure of the World Health Organization in the midst of the pandemic, the consequences of which were reflected, for example, in the distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine.

15. Resilience-building was imperative for Caribbean countries. Economies must evolve to withstand different types of shocks and not succumb to systemic failures. It was not enough to build back better; it was necessary to build forward better. Small island developing States were disproportionately affected by the pandemic, given their inherent vulnerability to disasters and high dependence on tourism, which had taken a severe hit. However, those countries were classified as middle-income countries on the basis of outdated tools for measuring wealth and therefore had no access to concessional financing. It was imperative to develop a vulnerability matrix, given that per capita GDP did not reflect the vulnerability of their economies.

16. Cuba and Nicaragua reiterated that the unilateral coercive measures imposed by the United States of America – which had intensified under the previous administration – harmed key sectors, such as tourism, and impeded countries' development. Furthermore, they noted that those measures represented a systematic and flagrant violation of the human rights of the population and could be deemed a crime against humanity in times of pandemic.

17. A civil society representative presented a document entitled "The organizations of the society civil Latin America and the Caribbean before the decade of action for the implementation of Agenda 2030". It highlighted the need to strengthen the democratic systems of the countries of the region and address the COVID-19 crisis with a human rights approach, promote decent work, respect the human rights of vulnerable groups, protect land and environmental defenders, journalists and human rights defenders, collect disaggregated data on the fulfilment of human rights, address the widespread increase in poverty and hunger, contain the advance of religious and other forms of fundamentalism and guarantee the human right to migration. Civil society organizations also called for financial, political and legal commitments to ensure compliance with the 2030 Agenda and the creation of an environment in which cooperation and solidarity, within the framework of the 2030 Agenda, were given the requisite capacities, policy frameworks and earmarked State resources. They also called for the ratification of the Inter-American Convention on Protecting the Human Rights of Older Persons, to guarantee a dignified old age for the people of the region.

18. Other dialogues took place during the fourth meeting of the Forum, one on the false dichotomy between health and the economy, in which it was highlighted that health was a human right and a fundamental public good that must be guaranteed by the State. The pandemic had made it clear that full access to quality health-care systems was essential for inclusive and sustainable economic development. Another panel focused on addressing the crisis, recovery and transformation in the decade of action for the Sustainable Development Goals, in which panellists noted that although achieving the Goals by 2030 now seemed difficult, the 2030 Agenda would remain the basis for reflecting on the development model. In that regard, it was proposed that discussions take place on the possibility of adjusting some of the Goal targets, to avoid the frustration of not achieving them by the agreed deadline, and on the importance of innovative financing instruments. The outcomes of each panel are further detailed in the summary of the Chair of the fourth meeting of the Forum.

IV. Building forward better in the Caribbean beyond COVID-19: critical issues to keep the 2030 Agenda in sight

19. In the framework of the ECLAC Caribbean First strategy, officially launched during the thirty-seventh session of ECLAC in 2018 and aimed at giving a prominent place to the Caribbean subregion in the work of ECLAC to better address the specific needs and vulnerabilities of Caribbean countries, the representatives of those countries, in the specific panel on the Caribbean, stated that the measures implemented to prevent the spread of COVID-19 had exacted a heavy toll on the economic, social and psychological well-being of Caribbean citizens. Consideration had to be given to how to reignite the engine of growth and recover jobs in the Caribbean in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, explore options for financial support to prevent a spiral of deepening debt, safeguard the welfare of women and children, who had been disproportionately affected by job losses in the informal economy, in particular, and by school closures, and how to seize the opportunity to address both new and long-standing issues that continued to compromise the development trajectory of the Caribbean.

20. There was a need for a new deal for human development in the countries of the subregion, including a change in the educational model. In the Caribbean, the pandemic had highlighted the importance of an innovative strategy for the effective management of non-communicable diseases. Human-resource capacity had to be built in terms of people's resilience, given that human resources were the greatest resource in the fight against any disease. With regard to building resilience, consideration had to be given to the kind of communities that the subregion wanted to build. Opportunities had to be created for men and women to own assets, not merely perform income-generating activities.

21. The pandemic had affected social protection systems and public debt levels, and limited Governments' fiscal space and room for manoeuvre. In addition, Caribbean countries classified as middle-income countries had difficulty in gaining access to financing; therefore, innovative financing initiatives (such as the Debt for Climate Adaptation Swap initiative, the proposed establishment of a Caribbean resilience fund and the inclusion in loan conditions of clauses covering events such as hurricanes and pandemics) were necessary and welcome. A review of the global financial architecture was needed to provide the means of implementation for sustainable development in small island developing States. The proposed issuance of new special drawing rights and reallocation of surplus special drawing rights from developed to developing countries should be envisaged not only for low-income countries but also for middle-income countries. The crisis was an opportunity to leverage the global discussion on financing for development, taking into account the context of

COVID-19 and the specific needs and vulnerabilities of small island developing States and middle-income countries in the Caribbean.

22. The representatives of the Caribbean countries stressed the importance of creating new governance models that were inclusive, with real involvement of people in public policy and development. Building forward better had to be truly inclusive. It was also important to incorporate into the regional agenda the specificities of the Caribbean, including both challenges and strengths; the Forum provided a space to advance in the development of those opportunities to build forward better.

V. Contribution of the United Nations system

23. In the session on the contribution of the United Nations system, the Deputy Secretary-General, in a pre-recorded statement, said that, over the past year, the COVID-19 crisis had dealt a setback to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Governments in Latin America had responded to the health and socioeconomic crisis with urgency, using available tools, and several had showed exemplary leadership in limiting transmission of the virus. The 2020 system-wide results report of the United Nations development system in Latin America and the Caribbean that was being presented, a first-of-its-kind report, showed how the United Nations at the regional level had contributed to the response to the crisis. The report was aimed at creating greater transparency and accountability concerning the Organization's regional efforts and highlighted the vast potential of the Organization's regional assets. Thanks to the Secretary-General's reforms, the system was in a better position to support countries in the transition to a better future. The Deputy Secretary-General encouraged partners to continue to contribute to the regional architecture and thanked the Executive Secretary of ECLAC and the Regional Director of UNDP in their capacity as Vice-Chairs of the Regional Collaborative Platform for Latin America and the Caribbean for leading the development of that important report. The United Nations system in Latin America and the Caribbean would be a steadfast partner throughout the transformative journey towards achieving more equal, just and sustainable economies and societies.

24. The Vice-Chairs of the Regional Collaborative Platform for Latin America and the Caribbean presented the 2020 system-wide results report of the United Nations development system in Latin America and the Caribbean, which was aimed at showing how the United Nations system had contributed to supporting the response of the region's countries to the pandemic, with the objective of increasing the transparency, accountability and results-based management of its regional architecture. Key United Nations system-wide results at the regional level included the support provided to Member States in the region, United Nations country teams and United Nations resident coordinators in their response to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, through evidence-based policy guidance, capacity-building support and the establishment of regional knowledge-sharing and communication platforms. Inter-agency initiatives had been launched to provide integrated responses to the challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Joint actions had been taken to address the structural causes of inequality and promote a transformative recovery with equality and sustainability in line with the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as actions to foster cooperation and partnerships, to accelerate Goal implementation.

25. In addition, during the meeting, consultations were held with Member States in the region on the issue-based coalitions of the Regional Collaborative Platform established for the region (on climate change and resilience, crime and violence, equitable growth, governance and institutions, human mobility, and a new one on

financing for development) and its two cross-cutting thematic working groups (one on youth and another on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls). The regional knowledge platform on the 2030 Agenda in Latin America and the Caribbean (Sustainable Development Goal gateway) was also presented, having been developed following the Secretary-General's second recommendation, related to the establishment of strong knowledge management hubs in each region through the pooling of policy expertise, in his report on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 71/243 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, 2019 (A/74/73-E/2019/14, para. 113). The Sustainable Development Goal gateway consolidates and displays the regional work of the United Nations development system related to the 2030 Agenda and the Goals, including key events, data and statistics, analytical tools and knowledge products. The platform has enhanced the visibility and accessibility of the regional assets of the United Nations development system, including the work of the issue-based coalitions and the two cross-cutting thematic groups, as well as the work on all the Goals at the global, regional and national levels.

26. Through those presentations, the United Nations system reiterated its readiness to continue to be at the forefront in supporting Member States in the region to leverage the capacity of the United Nations system at all levels and provide more ambition, solutions and actions to speed up progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and to deliver high-quality outputs to address the socioeconomic emergency while fostering a transition to a transformative development model.

27. A number of countries highlighted the contribution of the United Nations system during the pandemic. The only way to address global challenges comprehensively and inclusively was through strong and effective multilateralism, and a global crisis required interlinked global responses, through the multilateral forum par excellence that was the United Nations. In that regard, the United Nations system was a great ally of the countries of the region and had redoubled its efforts to support them, showing efficient coordination among entities, organizing the use of available resources and offering tailored assistance based on a comprehensive vision of the region's challenges. The representatives also expressed their satisfaction with the process of reforming the system, while recognizing that there was always room to improve processes and increase efficiency, and their wish that the Regional Collaborative Platform continue to grow stronger and contribute to the needs of countries, in line with national priorities and in support of the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

VI. Intergovernmentally agreed conclusions and recommendations of the fourth meeting of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development

28. The intergovernmentally agreed conclusions and recommendations of the fourth meeting of the Forum were adopted. They had previously been submitted to the countries for a series of consultations facilitated by the Government of Costa Rica, the country serving as Chair of the fourth meeting of the Forum, through the Permanent Mission of Costa Rica to the United Nations in New York. On the adoption of the conclusions and recommendations, the Chair underscored that the document struck an important balance between the ongoing implementation of and follow-up to the 2030 Agenda and the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and thanked delegations for their participation and flexibility in the consultation process.

VII. Closing round table on the theme “Building an inclusive and effective pathway to achieve the 2030 Agenda within the context of the decade of action and post-pandemic recovery from COVID-19”

29. The participants in the closing round table agreed that there was a need for immediate action and unified efforts for the decade of action for the Sustainable Development Goals and to meet the challenges of the pandemic. Latin America and the Caribbean had to seize that opportunity to strengthen regional integration once and for all. Universal, timely and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines was critical to the global recovery and, as a global public good, had to be incorporated into the themes of the decade of action. On the road to building forward better, efforts had to be anchored in human rights, which represented the best vaccine against hunger, poverty, inequality and many other ills facing humanity. A new social contract with opportunities for all was also required. The experience of the pandemic provided countries with an opportunity to implement policies for progressive social equality and to make progress in relation to one of the main challenges facing the region: reducing inequality (Goal 10). Equality was a prerequisite for economic growth. The welfare model had to be broader and multisectoral and had to incorporate equality and sustainability. Sectors that could drive growth with sustainability included energy transition, sustainable mobility and urban planning, sustainable tourism, the circular economy, the digital revolution, the health-care manufacturing industry and the care economy. The importance of full and equal access to health, education, nutrition, digital technologies, drinking water and other public services was highlighted. The pandemic had shown that countries with stronger health and social protection systems were more resilient to crises.

30. The decade of action for the Sustainable Development Goals had to be accompanied by more efficient coordination among all entities of the United Nations system. There was a need for effective multilateralism that improved the living conditions of people on the ground. The contribution of voluntary national reviews to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, through the linking of national actions with global multilateral policies and the alignment of the efforts of different actors within each country, was underscored. Countries had already been off track from achieving the 2030 Agenda before the pandemic, and there were five areas that had to be the priorities of the recovery: the alignment of public policy with the Goals, job creation, private sector collaboration, social protection and domestic finance. With regard to debt, political consensus must be forged for a comprehensive solution, working through subregional and regional organizations to support what was already happening at the global level, and engaging with private sector creditors and debtors.

31. The need for useful and relevant data to better assess the situation of the countries was underscored; more sophisticated and multidimensional measurements of poverty were needed. Middle-income countries had to have access to international financing on more favourable terms in order to address the urgent need for liquidity to meet the challenges imposed by COVID-19. The debt levels of the Caribbean countries were unsustainable. Those countries needed debt relief urgently, and for many of them the only way forward was through investment in climate change adaptation and mitigation. Nature-based solutions were not only good for society but could also be cost-effective. Civil society was calling for a paradigm shift: more citizen participation, more democracy and human rights, more equality and harmony with nature were needed. Human rights and environmental defenders were also in urgent need of protection. In that regard, the ratification of the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (Escazú Agreement) was important. Partnerships

such as the Regional Collaborative Platform for Latin America and the Caribbean were aimed at maximizing the capacities of each member; thus support for countries in, for example, the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda was also encouraged.

32. More specifically, in her concluding remarks, the Executive Secretary of ECLAC mentioned that the regional consensus reached at the fourth meeting of the Forum supported the urgent need to build fair and sustainable societies that addressed inequality and guaranteed citizenship and rights, as well as the urgent need to act together as a region to ensure access to COVID-19 vaccines and to share capacities and experiences so that the entire population was vaccinated. The Forum was a space that allowed the region to speak with its own identity about its realities and specificities, to recognize its rich diversity, and to encourage and align shared aspirations. The region had committed itself to overcoming inertia, to not returning to a pattern of development with slow growth, low productivity, insufficient employment, poverty, inequality and acute environmental and social crises, because there was nowhere to go back to: the world had changed.

33. It had been said loud and clear that equality was not the result of economic growth; it was a necessary, indispensable prerequisite for efficiency and for growth itself. The region had reiterated the urgency of moving towards a care society and had firmly recognized that when one woman advanced and transformed, everyone advanced, because when women advanced, society advanced. The pandemic had taught very important lessons: there were severe global asymmetries that had become even more evident because of the pandemic. The world had already seen financial and climate asymmetries; now, it was witnessing asymmetry in access to health and vaccines. It was experiencing new geopolitics of creation, production and distribution of vaccines. That was why the challenge of vaccination was at the heart of the current situation. Although the COVAX Facility was not a complete solution for the region, the Pan American Health Organization needed to be supported in the implementation and expansion of that initiative, and there had to be dialogue with the countries in the hemisphere that would have surplus vaccines and a mechanism for those vaccines to be distributed in the hemisphere. In that scenario, it was time for Latin America and the Caribbean to act collectively and seize the opportunity to achieve regional integration without further delay. ECLAC had proposed strengthening regional coordination mechanisms for acquiring vaccines, promoting the full functioning of the COVAX Facility, conducting awareness-raising campaigns for those who did not want to be vaccinated, pursuing negotiations with countries that would have a surplus of vaccines, exchanging information on best practices in the vaccination process and promoting greater flexibility of intellectual property systems.

34. The region had to support the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC). The Government of Mexico had made an earnest effort to change the conversation about vaccines. As the Pro Tempore Chair of CELAC, Mexico had spoken to the world and had presented to the United Nations an initiative for equitable access not only to vaccines but also to medicines and supplies. In addition, initiatives such as the joint production of vaccines between Mexico and Argentina should lead to better regional integration to create a health-care manufacturing industry. That required more equitable multilateralism. Those efforts should draw on the synergies provided by integration systems such as the Caribbean Community and the Central American Integration System. Societies in the region needed to build resilience to absorb change and to revitalize and recreate themselves. The only way out was towards a care society, a society that espoused social protection, health care, universal access to public services (such as the Internet and drinking water) and stewardship of the planet. Regarding that point, there were two different aspects: on the one hand, supporting Caribbean countries on issues such as debt relief, going beyond the

classification of countries by per capita income, and, on the other hand, forging new political and social compacts and coalitions that promoted a protective care society in which women would no longer shoulder the burden of care.

35. Value and wealth needed to be generated, not just extracted without innovation and with only scarce job creation. Hence the concern over the tendency towards the reprimarization of economies. To boost sectors that supported a transformative recovery, there needed to be industrial and technological policies that met environmental criteria. Even in the midst of the crisis, it was imperative to return to the path of sustainable development and to ensure that the transformative reconstruction had environmentally sustainable foundations. The scientific community had repeatedly warned about the seriousness of the environmental issue. Critical planetary thresholds had been breached, and the natural environment that sustained humankind could bear no more. ECLAC had insisted that the environment was crucial to connect the emergency with the recovery and with the decade of action, to address the planet's major challenges. An economic recovery with environmental sustainability and equality allowed for a faster resurgence from the recession, with substantial improvements in quality of life and health. That required policies that were aligned with the 2030 Agenda, new domestic and international political coalitions, and new forms of international cooperation to support the change in the development pattern. The arduous but successful process of adopting and implementing the Escazú Agreement testified to that being possible. Continuing to do the same thing could not be expected to produce different results. Therefore, it was crucial to resume actions to meet the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda.

36. Middle-income countries urgently needed access to international financing on more favourable terms, to meet their pressing need for liquidity to address the challenges created by COVID-19. Without exception, all countries in the region had experienced a deterioration in their fiscal situation and an increase in general government debt. It bore repeating that the debt levels of the Caribbean countries were unsustainable. They had already been unsustainable beforehand, but the slump in tourism had increased the urgent need for debt relief for the Caribbean, without further delay. Latin America had to show solidarity and contribute to overcoming the double asymmetry faced by Caribbean countries: they did not pollute, but they suffered enormously from the effects of pollution in other countries. The Latin America and the Caribbean region could not continue to tolerate its hitherto hallmark structural injustice. It was time to put an end to the culture of privilege and inequalities and to eradicate poverty in all its forms. The inefficiency of unsustainability and inequality was a matter of concern. The fact that there was no full access to health, to education, to nutrition or to digital technologies was inefficient now and would be even more inefficient in the future. The world had changed, but not for the better: national, regional and global asymmetries had worsened.

37. The Deputy Minister for Multilateral Affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship of Costa Rica, as Chair of the fourth meeting of the Forum, noted that the text of the agreed conclusions and recommendations was a clear road map for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and a common regional position for the high-level political forum on sustainable development. He reiterated that there was a consensus on the region's priorities in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic, as reflected in the political declaration on a sustainable, inclusive and resilient recovery in Latin America and the Caribbean adopted at the thirty-eighth session of ECLAC, held in October 2020 and chaired by Costa Rica. In closing, he urged the countries of the region to speak with a united voice in the multilateral system to achieve a different future for the region.