

**Implementing Cancun: Latin America's role in taking climate change to the next level  
Madrid, 15 February 2011**

**Address by Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary  
United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change  
to the Conference of the Secretariat General Iberoamericana (SEGIB)**

Sr. Enrique Iglesias, Secretario General de la Secretaria General Iberoamericana  
Sra. Teresa Ribera, Secretaria de Estado de Cambio Climático  
Excellencies  
Ladies and gentlemen

It is an honour and a pleasure to address such a distinguished audience on taking climate change to the next level. I imagine the question on many of your minds after Cancun was, “now, what?” What is the way forward from here and what is the way forward for Latin America in particular?

This is an important question, because like all regions of the world, Latin America is faced with climate change impacts that are specific to its circumstances. Latest research rates Central and South America's vulnerability to climate change as currently “high” and certainly as “severe and acute” by 2030. But Latin America also has a number of key opportunities for taking climate change action to the next level - both in adaptation and in mitigation. It is important that these opportunities are fully capitalised, notably through the Cancun Agreements.

The Cancun Agreements, reached under the steady guidance and outstanding leadership of Minister Patricia Espinosa, signified what was a big step forward for the community of nations, but a small step for the planet.

***They are a big step because of three major achievements:***

1- The agreements form the foundation for the most far reaching collective effort the world has ever seen to reduce carbon emissions and to build a system which makes all countries accountable to each other for those emission reductions.

- Building on emission reduction targets that had been put forward informally in 2010, under the CA all industrialized nations have officialized their reduction pledges, and have committed themselves to develop low-carbon development plans or strategies.
- In addition, 37 developing countries have officialized their nationally appropriate mitigation actions referred to as NAMAs, which seek a deviation from business-as-usual emissions by 2020, and are encouraged to develop low carbon growth strategies.

2- The Cancun Agreements include the most comprehensive package ever agreed by governments to help developing nations deal with climate change, including new institutions to boost technology cooperation, financing and adaptation. These include:

- A technology mechanism, which will be fully operational in 2012 and which will support the innovation, development and spread of new technologies.
- A Green Climate Fund, to provide long term financing to projects, programmes, policies and other activities in developing countries via thematic funding windows.
- An Adaptation Committee to promote the implementation of stronger action on adaptation.

3- The Cancun Agreements provide the strongest signal countries have ever given to the private sector that we are moving toward low-carbon economies, by committing to a maximum temperature rise of 2 degrees, and a consideration of a maximum of 1.5 degrees in the near future.

At the next UN climate change conference in Durban, much of the focus will be on finalizing and adopting the institution-building arrangements launched in Cancun, as well as the methodologies to provide the rigour and transparency.

***These achievements are undoubtedly a major step forward for governments, but at the same time they are only a small step for the planet.***

This is first and foremost because the level of ambition currently on the table amounts to only 60% of what is needed to limit the temperature increase to the agreed 2 degrees. Furthermore, a 2 degree increase is in fact no guarantee for the survival of small island states. Similarly, no agreement was reached on the year in which global emissions need to peak.

This is contrary to what science tells us is needed: a global peaking in 2015 and a 50% reduction compared to 2000 levels by 2050.

In Cancun, nations evidently chose to approach the challenge in a bottom-up manner through a compilation of best national efforts. It is hard to say whether this will suffice to keep the world on a 2C trajectory, or whether this would need to be complemented with a top-down international agreement, either through the Kyoto Protocol or in another way that would increase the certainty of the international framework. .

***They say that a beginning is the half of every action - this is a good starting point for taking climate change action to the next level***

The Cancun Agreements are a small step for the planet, but they are nonetheless a beginning that can spark more action.

While it remains to be seen whether the bottom-up notion will close the current emission reduction gap, this very notion allows countries to play to their strengths, to pave their best sustainable paths. Cancun provides important incentives to develop policies at the

national level that respond to the individual needs of countries - both in terms of adaptation and mitigation - while working in tandem with international policy.

***In terms of adaptation, national policy efforts are still in their infancy, although they are urgently needed.***

To date and in response to international efforts, many national initiatives have focused on identifying adaptation needs, but little real implementation has taken place.

For the development of adaptation policies and their implementation, local initiatives can indeed provide valuable input.

- This includes partial reforestation with fruit trees like in El Salvador, the replanting of mangroves to protect coast-lines like in Mexico, or the construction of elevated bamboo houses like in Ecuador.
- By assessing local adaptation initiatives and regarding them as input for policy-making, experience and knowledge from communities that have already had to adapt to specific climatic conditions can be shared and utilized to a country's advantage.

***In terms of mitigation, Latin America needs to capitalize on the incentives provided by the Cancun Agreements to take climate change action to the next level.***

The process of crafting low-carbon national policies that can work in tandem with international policy has already begun. In 2010, all G20 economies and also others have initiated or completed the development of economic growth plans that are strongly based on low-carbon growth.

This is encouraging because the 2C temperature limit and envisioned low-carbon growth in the Cancun Agreements will be impossible to achieve without significantly scaling up the use of renewable energies. But at present, formidable challenges to this still remain.

- In the case of Latin American countries-- Brazil, Peru, Columbia-- most electricity comes from hydropower, but the share of hydro has been falling in recent years as gas-powered and thermal generation have collectively provided a significant share of new generation.
- The danger in this is that if opportunities for hydropower development and other renewables are not explored, some countries in Latin America are likely to increase the carbon intensity of their fossil-fuel based power generation capacity as they rapidly build up infrastructure.
- This would lock-in long-lived, high-carbon infrastructure-- and waste their natural renewable energy endowments. Timing is everything.

The use of renewable energy needs to be expanded and go much further through the appropriate policies, incentives and government support at the national level. The Cancun Agreements provide many incentives that need to be utilised towards this.

- By dint of natural endowment, Latin American countries have huge potential for renewable energy generation -- wind conditions are ideal in Mexico, Central America, Northern Columbia and Patagonia; large parts of Latin American, receive high solar radiation levels; and geothermal resources are also significant, being located in a volcanic area. Biofuels already account for about 6 per cent of energy consumed in the transport sector.
- Nationally appropriate mitigation actions in developing countries can capitalise on these endowments and in this way hold both important sustainable development and major investment opportunities. They can be as much targeted at the local level as they can be at economic sectors, thereby attracting different levels of investment.

***Forests are another area in which Latin America can take climate change implementation to the next level through the Cancun Agreements***

The sustainable use of forests has multiple benefits not only directly for forest-dependent peoples, but also for a range of critical issues including biodiversity, climate change mitigation and adaptation.

The Cancun Agreements launched concrete action to preserve forests in developing nations, which will increase going forward. This is referred to as REDD+. The full financing options for the implementation of such mitigation actions in the forest area will be addressed during 2011.

This has opened an important door for Latin America. REDD+ is already being tested in some large-scale demonstration projects. For example, Norway's commitment of \$1 billion to help protect the Amazon rain forest contributed to Brazil's pledge to reduce deforestation by 80 percent by 2020.

This is an encouraging example that merits duplication. Latin American countries need to seize this opportunity and craft forest-related policies on the national level that go hand-in-hand with the Cancun Agreements so that the greatest benefits can be achieved.

***These and other opportunities created by the Cancun Agreements provide an important beginning for accelerated action by Latin America.***

With its expert knowledge, it is my hope that SEGIB will play a key role in facilitating this.

Ladies and gentlemen, I said that the Cancun Agreements were a giant step for the community of nations, but a small step for the planet. But if the small step for the planet is fully realised, acted upon and taken, they also provide an important beginning for action:

- Action at the local level to benefit the most vulnerable and those most in need
- Action at the national level to drive sustainable economic development of nations
- And continued action at the international level to ensure that an appropriate level of ambition and rigour will create a big step forward for the planet.

Thank you.

-----