



**Opening Remarks by Andrés Napoli, Alternate Elected Representative of the Public (Argentina), at the 7<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Negotiating Committee for a Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean.**

**Buenos Aires, Argentina, July 31, 2017.**

Good morning everyone. I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of Argentina's civil society, to welcome the delegates and representatives from the Latin America and Caribbean countries, members of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), representatives from international organizations present here today, representatives from the public of various countries from the region, the public from our country here with us, as well as all those who are following the transmission online from various places.

As part of Argentina's civil society, we are very pleased to welcome this new meeting of the Negotiating Committee - Principle 10 Agreement in Buenos Aires and, at the same time, to be directly involved in the construction of a highly innovative environmental agreement, with a rights-based perspective, but also having significant participation from the public in its development.



It is no coincidence that this process is blossoming at a time when the international community embarks on an ambitious path towards sustainable development. The full implementation of Principle 10 is undoubtedly at the heart of the 2030 agenda, since it ensures that all persons, especially those excluded or vulnerable, have reliable access to information and can effectively participate in decision-making processes, especially those in which their living conditions are affected, and that they can access justice; allowing a fairer distribution of the costs and benefits of development.

This path, launched at the Rio + 20 summit in 2012, was one of the responses given by countries to the explosive increase of environmental conflicts in the region, and the millions of people who suffer the consequences of pollution and pressure on natural resources.

However, as my colleague from Jamaica, Danielle Andrade pointed out, the situation in Latin America and the Caribbean shows that environmental conflict is far from diminishing; it has considerably increased.

In this sense, the sustainable development agenda includes, in a substantive manner, processes of informed and participatory dialogue, an issue that has often collided with the interests of those who see the participation and involvement of the public as an obstacle to the realization of their projects.

This is particularly relevant at a time when many countries in our region are seeking investments for the execution of works and projects which, even though, they may be key to meeting the needs of economic



development and improving the quality of life of the population, they cannot be carried out without the maximum precautions and safeguards in environmental matters, and with the necessary and indispensable participation of the public, as well as the consent from communities that inhabit the territories.

This is why we come to this new meeting with the expectation that agreements can be reached to build a robust instrument, guaranteeing the solid protection of standards for access rights, towards a solid sustainable development agenda in the region.

Argentina, when assuming the presidency of the 7<sup>th</sup> Negotiation Meeting, also assumed the challenge of conducting the process in a fast and effective manner, while maintaining the substantial aspects that guarantee access rights, and with the high standard of public participation that the process has exhibited thus far.

Issues on which negotiations are still pending, are very significant: a decision on the binding nature of the agreement has not yet been taken, and discussions on mechanisms for its implementation have not yet begun.

Still pending is the final text of Articles 6 to 9 which contain the substantial part that defines the scope of the rights and obligations established in the agreement.

For this reason, regional diplomats and civil society involved in the process both face a crucial challenge: that the rights enshrined in the agreement do not become a constellation of abstractions of doubtful character, but that they respond to the colossal environmental challenges of our time.

We have collaborated in a fruitful way throughout these five years of intense negotiations, with representatives of governments and civil society. It has been a learning process; we have built bridges of understanding and bonds of trust, having always placed mutual respect above all.

I believe it is no mistake to say that this negotiation has been growing and getting stronger in each instance, and that the process is solid enough to produce results that can be translated into a robust and legally binding agreement; contributing, above all, to the consolidation of democracy in the region.

Thank you.