

Remarks by Saint Lucian Delegate Ms. Kate Wilson

Legal Officer at the Department of Sustainable Development/ National Focal Point

And Chairperson of the Public Awareness Committee to the Escazu Agreement

Second Meeting of Countries Signatory to the Escazú Agreement

December 9-10, 2020.

Minister for Foreign Affairs, Immigration and Trade, Antigua and Barbuda, the Hon E. Paul Chet Greene; Minister for Foreign Affairs and Worship of the Republic of Costa Rica, the Hon. Rodolfo Solano; Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) Mrs. Alicia Barcena; Minister of State in the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs, Senator Maureen Hyman Payne; Ministers of the Environment and Sustainable Development from Latin America and the Caribbean, Delegates of the Countries Signatory to the Escazu Agreement, Elected Representatives of the Public, Civil Society, Academia, International and Regional Organizations, Ladies and Gentlemen, a pleasant good day to you all.

My name is Kate Wilson and as the Saint Lucian Delegate, I bring you warm greetings for good health, safety and solidarity from the Government and people of Saint Lucia and in particular the Department of Sustainable Development in which I serve as Legal Officer and which is headed by our Minister the Hon. Dr. Gale. T.C. Rigobert and her Permanent Secretary, Mrs. Anita Montoute.

Firstly, let me say how thrilled Saint Lucia is to be participating for the Second time at this very important Meeting for Countries signatory to the Escazu Agreement; the first having been held last year October, in Costa Rica.

This year, we are meeting under very different circumstances with the covid virus pandemic forcing us to be creative in the ways we interact and making it imperative that we find prompt and effective solutions to the health and environmental concerns which affect us all.

To do this we require proper access to information with effective public participation and access to justice which forms the cornerstone of the Escazu Agreement.

The issue of access rights and making it accessible to all has always been a priority for Saint Lucia and in keeping with the various provisions of the 3 tiers of the Escazu Agreement, at a national level, we have laid the groundwork for effective implementation of this very important environmental and human rights Agreement.

To this end, we have developed our national determined contributions (NDC) as part of the enhanced transparency framework which signatory countries are expected to develop and maintain. Further, the Department of Sustainable Development (DSD) is in the process of finalizing its National Inventory Report of anthropogenic emissions by sources and removal by sinks of green house gases and information necessary to track progress in implementing and achieving its NDC.

To date a National Adaptation Plan and several Sectoral Adaptation plans to deal with the ever increasing effects of climate change, land degradation and rising sea levels (among others) have been developed. A Medium Term Development Strategy for the period 2020-2023 has been approved by Cabinet as well as a Climate Change Research Policy and a Climate Change Research Strategy. Regarding Oceans and marine governance and biodiversity, we have approved a National Oceans Policy which promotes the blue economy and a revised 2018-2022 National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP). In 2018, a National Land Policy was also approved and a State of the Environment Report (2015) produced.

A key game changing tool, for the integrated approach to environmental management and sustainable development of Saint Lucia, has been the establishment and operationalization of the National Environmental Information System (NEIS) [www.neis.govt.lc]. The NEIS is a major milestone of the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) Cross-cutting Capacity Development Project 'Increase Saint Lucia's Capacity to Monitor MEA Implementation and Sustainable Development'.

The system is the first of its kind in the Caribbean Region and the premier publicly accessible platform for enhanced co-ordination of existing knowledge and generation of new information on the state of Saint Lucia's environment. The system stores and records data centrally from seventeen (17) agencies on Multilateral Environmental Agreement (MEA) indicators, specifically, UNFCCC, UNCCD and UNCBD, for generation of reports in easy-to-read formats.

To mainstream the use of this NEIS for impact, risk and vulnerability assessment in adaptation planning, "Saint Lucia: Into the Future" was produced with a descriptive audio-visual narrative linking the past, present and the future over the next 10 to 50 years under increasingly severe climate change conditions, land degradation and loss of biodiversity. As part of awareness-raising, education and outreach activities, this public education film is currently available on all social media platforms to encourage public participation in environmental management. Further we have established an open data portal as well as an open data policy. The Central Statistics office as well as the Department of Labour are also developing their own data information systems which certainly complements the NEIS by providing critical data so vital to our development planning. Additionally, the Saint Bureau of Standards is currently finalizing a slue of Environmental standards inclusive of standards for ambient air quality and air pollution levels.

Saint Lucia is also steadfast in its resolve that the path ahead should not be one of resignation, but rather one of action. That is why we have followed in the footsteps of

our OECS Counterpart and trailblazer, Antigua and Barbuda and ratified the Escazu Agreement. We now occupy the 12th. position on the ratification standpost, Over the last 3 years, the Department of Sustainable Development has embarked on a robust nation-wide public awareness campaign, to ensure that not only does the general public have the necessary information needed but that they are actively participating in conceptualizing the implementation of the Agreement. The Campaign has reached the youth, schools and communities through town hall meetings, public service announcements, jingles, poster boards, training for public authorities and the general public as well as varied stakeholder consultations and workshops and is very visible through the traditional and social media platforms like you tube and facebook. Most of the work done can also be found in the press room archives of the OECS Commission which feeds over 1000 outlets in Latin America and the Caribbean so the coverage is extensive, as well as the 411media platform of the DSD.

To ensure we have access to Justice covered, we have had very successful consultations with the Judiciary and the Bar Association, the National Workers Union and the Youth, who have all pledged their support in the implementation of this important Agreement. Further, we have an Environmental Management Bill as well as a Climate Change Bill now in its final stages of approval by our Attorney Generals Chambers. With the Caribbean among the top polluters of the oceans through plastic waste, we in Saint Lucia have moved to regulate the indiscriminate disposal of plastic beverages containers on the island and have before the AGs Chambers, a Management of Containers Bill aimed to do just that. There is also in progress an OECS REPLAST Pilot project which is a public private partnership aimed at managing and transporting for recycling plastic waste on island. Additionally, we have had in place a Styrofoam Act and regulations to ban and phase out such products and replace them with more biodegradable and environmentally friendly alternatives. The World Resources Institute has also begun its assistance to Saint Lucia by reviewing its legislative and procedural frameworks to facilitate implementation of the Escazu Agreement through a Consultancy entitled “**Advancing the Escazu Agreement and Climate Justice in the Caribbean Project**” which was launched on November 11 of this year.

The Escazu Agreement is also an important tool for achieving the 2030 SDG Agenda and to this end, Saint Lucia has established a coordinating mechanism comprising of the SDG Cabinet Sub-Committee of Ministers and a National Coordinating Committee to implement and monitor the SDGs. Accordingly, the National Coordinating Committee has conducted a rapid assessment to ensure the country’s national planning frame work is in alignment with the SDGs.

As a human rights Agreement, which espouses equality and can serve as a true platform for peace and protection for vulnerable persons and groups, we partnered with the Office of the High Commission for Human Rights Barbados office, to train various public officials and other stakeholders on the access rights as human rights. Our Cabinet of Ministers has also established a National Coordinating Committee on Human Rights which is the island’s lead on human rights matters and together with varied civil

society organizations and national groups which promote human rights, have developed a National Human Rights Action Plan for the period 2020-2024.

Vulnerable persons and groups are also given priority and this year saw the Country ratifying the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and acceding to its Optional Protocol. Further, this October 2020, saw the DSD with funding from UNESCO, partnering with Benetech Inc. a US non-profit organization, to implement and provide a Bookshare library platform offering membership and distribution of accessible materials to print disabled students and groups on the island.

More importantly, we are elated that the OECS Commission has recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with ECLAC for the next 2-3 years for the promotion of the Escazu Agreement and much work has begun in that vein particularly in the field of Oceans governance and fisheries as well as the CROP project.

Saint Lucia recognizes that now more than ever information is crucial for the path ahead holds no promise of security unless we work to achieve that. Public participation is mandatory at all levels of decision making and so is adequate access to justice.

We are ready to join hands towards positive action through partnerships and cooperation as we put the necessary frameworks in place to steer the implementation of this Agreement. The work has just begun and during the course of this meeting we will be discussing with experts in international law, academia, civil society groups and all others passionate about the environment and issues of sustainability, to forge the best course of action as this Agreement comes into force,

The Government and people of Saint Lucia therefore stands ready to abide by the Escazu underlying principles of transparency, accountability, equality and non-discrimination as we strive to provide access rights to a healthy environment to all persons..leaving no one behind.

I thank you!