

Opening Speech by Karetta Crooks Charles
Alternate Elected Representative of the Public – Saint Lucia
at the Sixth Negotiating Committee Meeting
Brasilia, Brazil
March 20, 2017

I would like to acknowledge the protocol that has already been established. A very pleasant afternoon to all government delegates, experts, specially invited guests, the media and fellow members of the public. Thanks to the government of Brazil for its hospitality and of course to ECLAC for coordinating this important meeting.

On behalf of the members of the public, I express my sincere thanks for this continued opportunity to actively participate in the negotiations for a Regional Agreement on Principle 10. In preparation for this meeting the public has revised and submitted text proposals that we believe will enhance articles 6-10 which address access to information, participation, access to justice and capacity building. We have identified and shared with the governments what we believe are the key priorities in each of these areas.

The right to environmental information is essential to the protection of the environment. The right to information must guarantee the attainment of clear, accurate and timely information about the possible effects of a new law or regulation, project or activity and its impact on communities. A few priority outstanding issues we have identified in articles 6 and 7 focus on the following elements: accessibility to environmental information; references in the text to national legislation; the regime of exceptions of access to information; information about human health and safety, and procedures for information requests.

Meanwhile, some of the priority areas we have identified for public participation include: ensuring timely participation; accountability on the outcome of the participation; special consideration to ensure the participation of specific groups such as those directly affected, the indigenous and those in vulnerable situation.

We therefore, look forward to governments' consideration of our proposals as we collectively work towards a robust agreement that would strengthen environmental governance in Latin America and the Caribbean.

This process is even more critical now because across the region there are many examples where countries have laws relating to environmental governance, however, it is through the full implementation of Principle 10 that we will see the alleviation of conflicts between governments and civil society. Presently in Saint Lucia, my organization, the Saint Lucia National Trust has been mandated by its members to advocate against, one, the proposed building of a Dolphin Park by a Mexican Company on one of the island's premier heritage sites, the Pigeon Island National Landmark or anywhere else on Saint Lucia and secondly, to advocate against the building of a causeway that would link the mainland to the Maria Islands Nature Reserve. This Nature Reserve consists of two off shore islands located in the south and is home to the world's rarest snake, the Saint Lucia racer and many endemic flora and fauna. The main issue in both cases is the lack of timely information and opportunities for active public participation at an early stage. In the absence of these essential pillars of Principle 10, unnecessary conflicts will abound. The Saint Lucia National Trust like many other civil society organizations across the region serve in an advisory capacity to governments, this must be seen as an important partnership to advance the conservation of our resources and to ensure the sustainable use of these resources for our enjoyment, benefit, livelihoods and as a catalyst to achieve economic growth.

We hope that more countries, like Saint Lucia will sign on during this year as we continue the negotiations. It is not too late to contribute to shaping this process, it is not too late to make the decision to place people at the center of our plans to safeguard our environment. In closing, I call not only on governments but on civil society to play their part in promoting Principle 10. Get creative, organize competitions, bring the messages to schools and communities, show the connection between Principle 10 and other issues, like climate change and the Sustainable Development Goals that might be more easily relatable.

I thank you.