



**Opening Remarks by Irene Murillo Ruin, Public Representative (Costa Rica) and Executive Director of CEDARENA, at the 9th 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.
San Jose, Costa Rica | February 28, 2018.**

Good morning to all, Presiding Officers; Mr. Edgar Gutiérrez, Ambassador of Chile; Representatives of ECLAC; Mr. Tomás Severino, elected representative of the public.

As a representative of the public and on behalf of the Centro de Derecho Ambiental y de los Recursos naturales (CEDARENA), I have the honour today to welcome you to the Ninth Meeting of the Negotiating Committee of the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The access rights enshrined in Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development are closely related to the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. The fact that we are here today demonstrates the commitment of the region: governments and civil society collaborating and having the opportunity to be actively involved in this matter.

Our organization had the opportunity to participate in this exemplary process of public involvement for the first time in 2014. It was a rewarding experience to observe and participate in the strong and serious work of non-governmental organizations. We deeply appreciate the opportunity to accompany this extraordinary process once again.

We believe that the rights to access environmental information, to participate in decision-making matters regarding the environment and access to environmental justice are vital rights to effectively bring the human right to a healthy environment to the real world. And this is not an abstract thing. We are referring to the effective rights that can change the lives of people in our countries, of the leaders we know in our communities and with whom we work, and the organizations from where we fight to improve our region every day.

Today, Latin America and the Caribbean have the opportunity to make a change in the effective exercise of access rights for the public and in the positive channelling of socio-environmental conflicts. This is why we hope that this time an ambitious and, above all, binding agreement will be reached. An agreement that ensures the widest participation and the strongest legal basis for the public to benefit from the convention. As civil society we believe that the level of participation that has been achieved in this negotiation process should continue after the agreement is reached, in its implementation and follow-up.

This is the moment for strengthening environmental democracy in the region. The strengthening of democracy includes in a fundamental way the protection of environmental defenders. It is a reality that, in



the region, every year we lament that environmental defenders did not receive the recognition, protection and support that their work required. Harassment, persecution, intimidation or submission to coercive measures are repeated throughout the region. The region loses environmental defenders. A community leader should not fear reprisals while protecting their rights and that of their family when faced with the reality of pesticide contamination of their water sources. Environmental groups opposed to large unsustainable projects need to make their voices heard without fear. These text proposals that we have been working on fill us with hope.

Ladies and gentlemen, representatives of the States, this agreement is necessary. But besides necessary it is urgent.

Thank you very much.

