

## **DRAFT**

### **Keynote – “U.S. Vision for Sustainable Development in the Americas”**

U.S. Deputy Permanent Representative Lawrence J. Gumbiner

Thank you for that kind introduction, Ambassador. I want to start by echoing Ambassador Lomellin in her expression of gratitude to Secretary General Insulza and the OAS for hosting this event. I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge colleagues from OAS missions, the U.S. government and representatives of leading NGOs who serve on the steering committee for the *Sustainable Communities* project and are here in attendance this morning.

As the Ambassador mentioned, before my arrival to the U.S. Mission, I had the privilege of serving as State Department coordinator for the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20). After two full years of preparatory meetings and marathon negotiation sessions that culminated in a fifty-three page outcome document, one unmistakable conclusion emerged from discussions at Rio+20; namely, that the sheer scale of the challenges we face together as inhabitants of the same planet -- climate change, rising energy demand, resource scarcity, among others -- can only be addressed by collective action.

At Rio the international community explored the dramatic changes in environmental, social and economic conditions since the groundbreaking gathering of 1992. With the benefits of science and communication, we know more about the planet we live on, and the interrelationship among resources, the health of ecosystems, social and economic well-being, than at any time in human history. We know now how sustainable development is intricately linked to fundamental

issues such as good governance, democratic institutions, and sound economic policy. We know now that green economic growth should be pursued not only because it safeguards our resources for future generations, but because it makes economic sense that provides jobs and improved standards of living.

As such, Rio was as much about the next 20 years as the past 20. That is why Secretary Clinton affirmed when addressing the Conference: **“In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the only viable development is sustainable development; the only way to deliver lasting progress for everyone is by preserving our resources and protecting our common environment...We believe solutions require action by all of us.”**

The new development paradigm is one based on *integration* of social, environmental and economic factors, and *collaboration*. This collaboration is one that reaches across borders. No single country can solve such problems as sea-level rise, water scarcity, or serious pandemics on its own. As the world’s oldest regional organization, the OAS has a long history of fostering partnerships that have produced tangible benefits for the peoples of the Americas.

But one of the most dramatic advances in our development paradigm over the past 20 years is the recognition that as no single country can solve these problems, nor can governments alone. At Rio the global community declared in clear terms that the robust engagement of civil society – of NGOs, the private sector, scientists and academics – is fundamental toward building a sustainable future. Again, the OAS and initiatives in the Americas have been a leader in this area. Whether it is cooperation through the Inter-American Metrology Network (SIM) -- as a result of which 11 countries in the hemisphere now have internationally recognized

measurement standards that facilitate trade while ensuring public health and safety -- or the exchange of best practices through the Inter-American Social Protection Network, the OAS has demonstrated the value of public-private partnerships as a tool for enhancing economic growth, making it more inclusive and more sustainable.

One prime example of multi-stakeholder engagement that emerged from the initiative of OAS Member States is the Energy and Climate Partnership of the Americas (ECPA), which was launched at the Fifth Summit of the Americas in 2009 in Port of Spain. ECPA was founded as a platform for engagement and partnership among governments, civil society, and the private sector that facilitates the exchange of creative solutions, new technologies and best practices for addressing climate and energy challenges.

In the three years since ECPA was launched, OAS countries have collaborated on over 40 ECPA projects, and has committed more than 150 million dollars in support of bilateral and regional ECPA initiatives. Specific initiatives in which the United States has been engaged range from climate change adaptation workshops and solar panel installations in rural communities, to electricity regulation roundtables and energy efficiency workshops with regional leaders.

ECPA's flexible framework serves as an important model for future sustainable development initiatives. It creates opportunities for a number of OAS countries to take on leadership roles. For example, at the last Summit, host country Colombia launched Connecting the Americas 2022, a ten-year effort to achieve universal access to electricity by enhancing electrical interconnections across borders. And Mexico has demonstrated exemplary leadership through the ECPA Energy

Efficiency Working Group, bringing in governmental and industry officials to exchange information on best practices related to policy and regulatory frameworks, equipment certification and standards and labeling.

One of the great lessons of Rio is that many of the most innovative and effective sustainable development solutions originate not with governmental policymakers but in the communities where the impacts are most acute. Leading up to Rio I had the opportunity to work across the U.S. with many mayors and civic leaders, and I was struck at some of the remarkable policies and practices – in transportation, housing, water and energy – that have been undertaken on the local level with little or no federal government involvement to advance sustainable development.

In this context, the U.S. Mission is pleased to partner with the OAS as it embarks on a new ECPA initiative that seeks to strengthen the capacity of civil society to contribute to sustainable development. Through the *Sustainable Communities in Central America and the Caribbean* project, fourteen novel proposals for community-level development will be piloted in ten different countries.

Selected from over sixty proposals received by the OAS, the projects that will receive funding support a range of work, from strengthening the network of micro hydro-electric systems in the Dominican Republic to the development of a Sustainable Transportation Plan in St. Kitts and Nevis. Another project will aim to increase the capacity of indigenous Mayan communities in Guatemala to mitigate the risk of forest fires. Two projects, one in Belize and one in El Salvador, address the urgent need to increase recycling rates in order to reduce hazardous pollution associated with waste disposal. While these projects deal with issues unique to each community, the common thread that ties them together is a holistic approach

to development that stresses resiliency and long-term economic, social and environmental sustainability.

Equally important, the fact that the coordinating entity for this project is the OAS – the hemisphere’s leading forum for high-level political dialogue – creates a unique opportunity to draw the attention of policymakers and representatives of international financial institutions to specific projects and programs that could be scaled up or replicated in other countries of the hemisphere.

The countries of the Americas – and the people in our communities -- harbor a wealth of knowledge and experience on sustainable city and community development. We invite all OAS countries to contribute to the project by working through the OAS technical secretariat to offer technical expertise and share best practices with project implementers.

The global community at Rio has set forth a path toward a sustainable future. With political leadership, that future will be built on the foundation of thousands of projects, small and large, that galvanize the energy and initiative of our citizenry. Today we are launching one such project, and with the leadership of the Organization of American States and the backing of its member states, we will begin to fulfill the promise of Rio one step at a time. Thank you.