POLICY DIALOGUE:
ADVANCING JUST AND INCLUSIVE ENERGY POLICIES IN THE AMERICAS

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RAPPORTEURSHIP

(Prepared by the OAS Summits of the Americas Secretariat)

The transition to clean, sustainable, and renewable energy in the Americas is a crucial imperative in the fight against climate change and the pursuit of a more prosperous and equitable future for all people in the region. In this context, it is essential that this transition is just and inclusive, ensuring that benefits and obligations are distributed equitably among all sectors of society. This approach is supported by the mandates contained in the document "Accelerating the Just Transition to Clean, Sustainable and Renewable Energy", adopted by the Heads of State and Government at the Ninth Summit of the Americas in Los Angeles in 2022. These mandates commit participating states to implement an energy transition that not only promotes environmental and economic sustainability, but also social justice and the protection of human rights at all stages. The inclusion of multiple perspectives and voices in the transition process not only strengthens the legitimacy of the measures taken, but also ensures that more informed and effective decisions are made to build a more equitable and resilient energy future for all.

The policy dialogue "Accelerating Just and Inclusive Energy Policies in the Americas" took place on the occasion of the VI Ministerial Meeting of the Energy and Climate Partnership of the Americas (ECPA), on March 14, 2024 in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic. The event was convened by the Summits of the Americas Secretariat of the Organization of American States (OAS) in conjunction with the Department of Sustainable Development of the same organization, as the technical secretariat of ECPA, with the collaboration of the Office of the Special Rapporteur on Economic, Social, Cultural and Environmental Rights (REDESCA) of the OAS Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR).

In view of the beginning of the preparatory phase of the Tenth Summit of the Americas, as well as in the framework of the follow-up to the implementation of the mandates of the Ninth Summit of the Americas, held in Los Angeles in 2022, the event sought to generate a direct dialogue and debate between relevant actors, representatives of stakeholders in the Summit Process, including government officials from the energy sector, institutions of the Joint Summit Working Group (JSWG), representatives of civil society and the private sector, on best practices and experiences to develop and advance just and inclusive energy transition policies and strategies, with an emphasis on social, economic and environmental justice considerations.

CONTEXT AND DIAGNOSIS

The dialogue opened with an introduction by Maria Celina Conte, Director of the OAS Summits Secretariat, who highlighted the opportunity represented by the fact that both the Chair of the Summit Process and that of ECPA are in charge of the Dominican Republic to promote shared agendas. This was followed by welcoming remarks by the Minister of Energy and Mines of the Dominican Republic,

For more information, please visit https://summit-americas.org/sas/ECPA_Dialogue.html
Mr. Antonio Almonte, who highlighted the relevance of the commitments established at the Ninth Summit of the Americas in relation to the transition to clean, sustainable and renewable energy. He further emphasized his country's commitment to leading a just and inclusive transition and encouraged other countries to follow suit. On the other hand, Ambassador James Lambert, OAS Secretary for Hemispheric Affairs, underscored the importance of integration between the Inter-American ministerial processes and the Summits of the Americas Process, highlighting the need for coordinated and aligned actions to advance towards these common objectives.

The dialogue continued with an introductory presentation by the IACHR's Special Rapporteur on Economic, Social, Cultural, and Environmental Rights, Mr. Javier Palummo Lantes, who stressed that the transition to clean, sustainable, and renewable energy in the Americas must be addressed from a perspective of justice and inclusion, recognizing the errors and challenges that have characterized the carbon-based economy. This change is critical to rectifying inequalities, preventing environmental degradation and protecting human rights at all stages of the process. He stressed that the mandates adopted at the Ninth Summit of the Americas highlight the importance of an energy transition that not only seeks economic and environmental benefits, but also social justice. However, it is crucial to understand that this transformation must be ethical and equitable, incorporating human rights principles into policy formulation and implementation. To achieve this, a collaborative approach between governments, businesses and civil society is required, where the needs and concerns of all sectors of society are recognized. The active participation of these actors, guided by a human rights approach, is essential to ensure a just and equitable energy transition that protects the rights of all people and communities, avoiding perpetuating injustices and environmental damage in the name of progress. In this regard, on behalf of ESCER, he pledged to provide technical assistance to contribute to the creation and implementation of policies that put human rights at the center of this transition, avoiding practices that are harmful to their guarantee and promoting a change towards a more just and sustainable future.

The panel, which was moderated by Mr. Alfonso Rodríguez, Vice Minister of Energy Savings and Efficiency of the Dominican Republic, was joined by Ms. Rosilena Lindo, Secretary of Energy of Panama, Natacha Marzolf, Senior Energy Specialist of the Department of Infrastructure and Energy of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB); Mr. Xavier Hernández Ferre, Deputy Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in the Dominican Republic; Mr. Ángel Mejía, CEO of Inventive Power, Young Americas Business Trust (YABT); and Mr. Juan Ignacio Rubiolo, Executive Vice President and President, Energy Infrastructure, AES Corporation.

Starting with contextual issues, the panel highlighted that, in Latin America, approximately 60% of the energy matrix comes from renewable sources, an indicator that makes it the region with the largest clean matrix on the planet and that accounts for the progress towards the energy transition in the region. This figure reflects considerable progress compared to previous years, suggesting a positive shift in the direction of more sustainable economies that are less dependent on fossil fuels. The panel recognized this achievement as a solid starting point to continue advancing towards the energy transition, but at the same time be more just and inclusive and throughout the hemisphere.

It was further stressed that access to energy is a crucial element for human development, as it acts as a catalyst for improving socio-economic issues such as gender equity, education, sustainable production and health, among others. It was stressed that it should be understood that energy is not only limited to providing light and cooling, but also drives growth and development in various sectors. In addition, it was highlighted that the current diversification in energy uses highlights the importance of understanding the complexity of the energy system and the need to address it in a comprehensive manner. Despite the progress, it is recognized that there are still pending challenges, but there is a greater consensus and commitment to the materialization of human rights standards and concrete recommendations in the energy sphere.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TRANSITION
The energy transition represents a crucial opportunity to rectify the inequalities and environmental damages rooted in the fossil fuel-based economic model. To achieve effective transformation, it was highlighted that it is essential to adopt a human rights approach that fosters inclusion and justice at all stages of the process. This involves facilitating an open, participatory, and ongoing social dialogue, where diverse perspectives are considered and technological, economic, and environmental considerations are comprehensively addressed.

In undertaking this task with a human rights approach, it was argued that it is imperative to promote an inclusive and transparent debate that allows for public policies and private initiatives, as well as public-private cooperation, guided by equity and inclusion. Policy and regulatory formulation must be based on a holistic framework that balances economic and technological needs with social and environmental needs. It was stressed that it is essential to recognize that a successful energy transition is not only about achieving greater efficiency and sustainability, but also about addressing structural injustices and promoting the active participation of all sectors of society.

The panel focused on the crucial aspects of justice and inclusiveness within the framework of the energy transition, recognizing them as fundamental pillars that must guide any transformation process in this area. Justice, in this context, implies the establishment of an inclusive and transparent social dialogue that is part of permanent and continuous governance, thus facilitating the design and implementation of policies and measures that are truly fair and equitable for all actors involved. In addition, the importance of recognizing and addressing the latent risk of perpetuating imbalances and socio-environmental problems by accelerating the energy transition was highlighted, such as if the urgency to abandon fossil fuels resulted in the replacement of oil sacrifice zones with mining sacrifice zones. This critical focus on the challenges inherent in the transition underscores the need for careful planning and a thorough assessment of the social, economic, and environmental implications at each stage of the process.

Inclusivity in the energy transition process demands the active and representative participation of a wide range of sectors from the initial stages of public policymaking. The imperative need to close the gender gap, promote the protagonism of youth and guarantee the voice and presence of historically marginalized communities in this process of change is highlighted. In the specific case of women, it was called for their participation in decision-making spaces, as well as full integration into the energy industry, ensuring not only equal opportunities, but also protection and support every step of the way. Recognizing the innovative and transformative potential of young people, their entrepreneurship and active participation in the energy field are promoted, providing space and resources for their development and leadership. Likewise, a strong call was made to include other social groups in each community as appropriate in all phases of the development and implementation of energy policies aimed at the transition, as well as in the feedback and evaluation of these, recognizing that justice and inclusiveness are fundamental pillars that reinforce each other to guarantee a truly equitable and sustainable energy transition.

GOOD PRACTICES AND OPPORTUNITIES

In the search for good practices and opportunities to move towards a fairer and more inclusive energy transition, actions were identified in the region. For example, institutions such as the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) are providing technical assistance and financing for projects that strengthen the resilience of energy infrastructure and promote the sustainable development of green hydrogen. Through these mechanisms, they are supporting countries and communities at all stages of the energy transition, from diagnosis to the installation of technologies, with a focus on justice and inclusion.

In addition to these actions, current challenges in areas such as technological innovation were highlighted, with the promotion of technological development in the region being crucial to avoid overdependence. The need to review the current system of regulation and licences, which are in many cases obsolete, was also highlighted in order to promote the successful implementation of new
technologies. It is essential that states in the region exchange good practices in the issuance of permits, ensuring that these processes are fair and inclusive, and that they result in regional quality standards. Finally, the importance of effective public-private collaboration as an enabler to implement the energy transition with characteristics of justice and inclusiveness was mentioned.

CONCLUSION

The policy dialogue underscored the imperative need for a transition that is not only environmentally clean, but also socially and humanly ethical and just. This comprehensive approach requires a strong commitment to inclusive participation and the incorporation of a human rights approach at all stages of the formulation and implementation of energy policies and actions.

This exchange highlighted that it is critical to recognize that a successful energy transition is not only about achieving greater efficiency and sustainability, but also about addressing the structural injustices rooted in the fossil fuel-based economic model. To this end, an inclusive and transparent social dialogue must be fostered that allows the design and implementation of fair and equitable policies and measures for all actors involved. Collaboration across sectors and the promotion of good practices are essential elements to address the challenges and move towards a sustainable and equitable energy transition in the Americas. In addition, it is vital to address current challenges in areas such as technological innovation and permitting. Fostering domestic technological development and reviewing outdated systems are critical steps in driving a just and inclusive energy transition in the region.

In short, the energy transition to a more sustainable and equitable future in the Americas depends on a collective commitment to inclusion, justice, and collaboration among all sectors of society. Only through a comprehensive and collaborative approach will it be possible to face the challenges of climate change and move towards a more just and sustainable energy future for all.