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“Climate Change and Inclusive Development”

Professor Geert ten Dam, President of the Board of Directors of the University of Amsterdam

Ministers of State of the Government of Costa Rica

H.E. Ambassador Marcel Beukeboom, the Dutch Special Envoy on Climate Change

Distinguished academic personnel and students of the University of Amsterdam

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to begin by thanking the University of Amsterdam, its President, Professor Geert ten Dam, and its *Rector Magnificus*, Professor Karen Maex, for the invitation to address this relevant topic, which is perhaps the most momentous of the challenges that humanity is facing today, and will face in the foreseeable future.



I find it fitting that the reflections I am to share with you today take place at this University, in this city, and in this country. The Netherlands has been a living example of a small country dealing with the upheavals of climate and the environment, and has shown remarkable leadership in both its adaptation and its conscientious approach to climate change. Costa Rica is appreciative of the many battles we have fought together in the international arena in achieving a meaningful approach to the challenges of sustainable development and climate change. Many of those efforts were crystallized in Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and its 17 Goals and in the Paris Agreement. However, on this topic the march goes on and we are certain that we will continue to raise our voices in order to achieve the common objective of evolving towards a global low-carbon development path, in order to hold the rise in the global average temperature below 1.5 degrees, and increase the ability to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change. While this might seem like a daunting objective given the forces we are against, I can assure you it is not, if all commit to raise our ambition in climate action.

It cannot be disputed that the current, profound changes to the environment have an anthropogenic origin, and the resulting climate change is the main cause of the unleashed power of the natural events that we are experiencing, at the alarming rate at which they are taking place. History is important, but it is far more important that we focus our attention upon the actions that need to be carried out. If the current trends of climate change are not addressed effectively, they may threaten our very existence.



There is a wealth of scientific data that allow us to identify the course of action to be taken to reverse or slow climate change. The challenges are not just in the creation and implementation of policy, although it is an important part of the equation. More relevant is to achieve political will to achieve a global approach to climate change that provides the enabling conditions towards concrete actions at the field level.

The Paris Agreement is a historical success in harnessing much-needed global cooperation. However, as science indicates, increased commitment on the reduction of emissions is needed in order to close the gap to achieve our global goals. The urgency of this task demands pre-2020 actions.

Although we still must do everything possible to reverse the advancement of climate change, it is clear that its effects are already impacting us, to the point where policy making must now also address, in earnest, issues of mitigation and adaptation and build resilience and sustainable societies.

Climate action needed in mitigation and adaptation places a tremendous burden on governments and communities, as the financial costs of addressing climate forces will need to come out of already over stressed public budgets. This may have, unfortunately, the trickling effect of affecting important public services and reduce our ability to achieve meaningful advances in eradicating poverty and other key development goals.



This burden appears to be more heavily placed on extremely vulnerable communities that are mainly made up of women, children, the elderly and people living in the situation of poverty. They suffer, directly, the full impact of climate change, and, at the same time, are the ones that end up paying up the lion's share of the costs of policy implementation.

A family headed by a female, which now makes up about 50% of all family nucleuses in most developing countries, living in a marginalized community, almost always close to a river, a coast or in fragile terrain, will bear the direct impact of stormy and irregular weather patterns. The rivers will swell more. The coast will be impacted more heavily by raising sea levels and the strength of natural phenomena. The fragile terrain will see more floods and more landslides, with the consequent loss of property and human life. We have seen that recently in countries like Peru and Colombia. But we have seen it also in Costa Rica – for example, we just suffered the effects of Hurricane Otto, the first direct impact of a hurricane on Costa Rican territory in recorded history. So how do we defend ourselves?

Fortunately, we live in times of change: convinced by reason and undisputable scientific evidence, several developed and developing countries around the world are moving forward under a new paradigm. These countries are moving towards a new low emission and resilient development pathway, working collectively for the construction of a safer, cleaner-decarbonized, and more sustainable global system, fully addressing required climate action and demonstrating that it is possible to have green economic growth, based on efficiency and eco-competitiveness.



This is indeed good news and we should all do our utmost effort in order to ensure that no regression takes place, either as a result of our own complacency or of geopolitical pressures. These efforts, including its financial costs, should be undertaken by governments, jointly with the private sector, cities and civil society, and must be part of the efforts to mainstream climate action as central to the national development planning process.

We believe multilateral action is the most enduring way to achieve sustainability in an age of increasing global challenges, because international solidarity and cooperation among States –large and small– is essential for achieving Human Development. International networks are indispensable to face the growing threats encroaching upon our planet's environment.

We must also carry out truly effective actions of inclusive development, and those actions are, mostly, of a political nature. They are political because they entail a ground change in policy so that we can effectively address the basic needs of the most vulnerable. These policies imply universal access to high-quality education, and real access to means that may enable entrepreneurship and adequate job access: that is, good stable jobs well paid. Moreover, climate change-related impacts have a range of implications, both direct and indirect, for the effective enjoyment of human rights. While these implications affect individuals and communities around the world, the effects of climate change will be felt most acutely by those segments of the population who are already in vulnerable situations owing to factors such as geography, poverty, gender, age, indigenous or minority status, and disability.



As I pointed out earlier, women in particular, bear the challenges and impacts of climate change to a disproportionate extent. Therefore, their needs and their ideas, their work and contributions, must be given special consideration when dealing with these challenges. In this regard, I would like to recognize and to thank the Government of the Netherlands for co-sponsoring, together with Costa Rica, actions focused upon developing a Gender Action Plan for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). We intend to address the question of why women are not included as major actors and agents of change in climate action. We have recognized that worldwide, women refuse to be passive actors in the face of climate change. This is encouraging, and we must therefore look at this initiative as a way to ensure that no one is left behind, and we must ensure that critical actors in facing this challenge are fully integrated.

We also note that human rights obligations and commitments are also integral, as they have the potential to inform and strengthen international and national policymaking in the area of climate change, promoting policy coherence, legitimacy and sustainable outcomes.

Now, I would like briefly to address the importance of achieving carbon neutrality and moving towards deep decarbonized societies with net zero emissions, and the challenges my own country is facing in achieving this important objective. Some of you may have heard me say this before, but I believe that it is pertinent to explain the path that Costa Rica chose to these goals.

More than half a century ago, Costa Rica established relevant policies towards renewable electricity production. Since the 1960s and to this day, hydroelectric power is our main source of energy supply,



representing over 75% of the country's energy matrix. Just recently my country made the international news for the extraordinary fact that in two consecutive years more than 98% of electricity production was from renewable sources, with energy obtained from hydro, geothermal, solar, wind and biomass sources, including several months with a record of 100% renewable. Today 99.4% of all Costa Rican households enjoy access to electricity, thus improving significantly the quality of life of their members, many of whom are women living in the countryside. I believe that today, we stand as world leaders in this feat.

Costa Rica's decision to go renewable was in no way improvised. It forms part of my country's determination, since its inception as a Republic in 1848, to craft a political system profoundly committed to ensuring the common good through public education, other public strategic services and solid democratic institutions.

The successful implementation of this vision, profoundly impacted by the decision to become a disarmed country in 1948, explains why Costa Rica has been able to devote the so called "peace dividend" into human development programs, and to be considered by international indices as one of the happiest nations on earth.

It also explains why, with an inland territory of only 51.100 square kilometers and whilst being a middle-income country, Costa Rica has been able to reverse deforestation and preserve 51% of its territory under some kind of either public or private environmental protection regime. These conditions reflect our commitment to the world at large, for our small country hosts 4% of the world's biodiversity. Our strong convictions were also reflected in a constitutional reform of 1994 that introduces the right to enjoy an ecologically balanced environment.



Thus, after many decades of experience, we have learned in Costa Rica that in order to turn environmental awareness into public policy, a country has to go well beyond traditional conservation practices. The “vision” has to be inclusive, and to include other central factors –public education probably being the most important of them all- that would allow the people to engage creatively and actively in the efforts of the public and private sectors to generate sustainable-oriented actions.

In line with this historical trajectory, and in compliance with the Sustainable Development Goals, Costa Rica recently drew up its National Energy Plan with a vision to 2030. This National Plan was the end product of an ample consultation process among social, political, academic, and business actors and is consistent with the national determined contribution (NDC) the country presented to the Paris Agreement. Costa Rica presented ambitious commitments in Paris, which maintain our early and visionary pledge to become carbon neutral by 2021 in the bicentennial of our Independence (understood as the stabilization of greenhouse gas emissions at 2005 levels) and also commits itself to a much more ambitious goal, incorporating a reduction of 25% of emissions by 2030 (compared with 2012) and by introducing the concept of deep decarbonizing of the economy, which implies the need for significant reductions of emissions until reaching zero net emissions by 2085. Other relevant elements of our NDC are the components of adaptation and considerations of equity and commitment to human rights and equality of gender.

These instruments and other important policies depict a horizon much more ambitious in terms of climate change and energy than we have ever had before. The energy plan integrates the electrical sector with the transportation sector. It is precisely here where our biggest challenge



lies: to significantly reduce the emissions resulting from the consumption of fossil fuels used for transportation purposes. This is an issue we must address and work out in the next few years if we are to comply with our goals.

In this regard, let us not forget that Costa Rica also committed itself, in the context of the Paris negotiations, to act as a laboratory for the decarbonizing process worldwide. Allow me to reiterate that commitment, and assure you of our continued support for all efforts currently under way in order to implement the historic Paris agreements. We must vow to uphold and protect the integrity of those agreements for they constitute a fundamental part of our patrimony.

As part of that formidable task, we have launched "The Green Hub", which is our proposal to accomplish these ambitious objectives. The "Green Hub" is an initiative to operate, at the country scale, as a laboratory for the decarbonizing of the economy. We are generating an ecosystem of innovation to pilot hard and soft technologies that are required in a new low emission economy. We want to operate as a laboratory for the implementation of projects, institutional arrangements and technologies, which would work as prototypes. The successful prototypes would be scaled up in other countries and regions.

We see knowledge sharing as a key element of the Green Hub, and we have started knowledge sharing in areas where Costa Rica has been successful such as conservation and management of natural ecosystems, forestry management, and innovative renewable energy initiatives. We visualize "The Hub" becoming a global epicenter for triggering solutions for post-Paris society.



Of course, these are ambitious, large-scale policy initiatives. Let us not forget, however, that, and coming back to inclusive development, we must also make sure that these initiatives reach all sectors of society, whether a Forbes 500 company, or a small farming family with a 2-hectare coffee plantation.

Let me share with you what our farmers are doing: You may or may not know that coffee plantations, particularly at high altitudes, are grown on slopes, and some of them can be rather steep. This way of farming proved to contribute to soil erosion because, in many instances, in order to plant the coffee, the forest on those slopes would have to be felled. When this happened, torrential rain would weaken the slope, since there were no trees to retain the soil, and erosion would take place. In addition, soil nutrients were also lost.

By educating our farmers on soil and plantation management, many of them are now leaving the trees without cutting them, or are planting new ones, in their coffee plantations, so that erosion can be stopped, and the soil may retain moisture and valuable nutrients. Those trees in turn will help capture carbon emissions. But those farmers are not only producing high quality coffee, with fewer chemicals, and where possible, fully organic. They are also planting secondary crops, be these avocados, or bananas, or other fruit. So, those 2 hectares are sustainably sourced. Of course, society has to acknowledge and stimulate these efforts, and help the farmers reach a decent living standard, by recognizing a fair price for their products.

In closing, I would just like to add that although small in size, both Costa Rica and the Netherlands are respected and admired voices, they are both recognized internationally for their strong advocacy for working



towards decarbonized societies, for meaningful inclusive development, and for opening up pathways so as to give voice to vulnerable actors and to create the spaces for a gender-balanced approach to policy creation and policy implementation.

I wish to thank the University of Amsterdam, not only for giving us the space and the opportunity to address this relevant topic, but also for its extensive research and conscious approach to Climate Change. The great Bengali poet and Nobel laureate Rabindranath Thakur in referring to teachers once said that while “good” teachers instruct, and “great” teachers demonstrate, only “superior” teachers inspire. Being at this prestigious *alma mater*, I am certain that we all can be inspired, and transmit that inspiration to the generations of tomorrow so as to achieve the extraordinary quest of Humanity to master the Universe without harming it.

Thank you!