

Rapporteur's Report

Inter-Secretariat Executive Meeting

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines



Executive Meeting
Kingstown, Saint Vincent and The Grenadines

1 March 2024

SP/REI-DSVG/IR-24



Copyright © SELA, March 2024. All rights reserved.
Printed in the Permanent Secretariat of SELA, Caracas, Venezuela.

The Press and Publications Department of the Permanent Secretariat of SELA must authorize reproduction of this document, whether totally or partially, through sela@sela.org. The Member States and their government institutions may reproduce this document without prior authorization, provided that the source is mentioned, and the Secretariat is aware of said reproduction.

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|---------------|
| I. BACKGROUND AND GENERAL INFORMATION | PAGE 1 |
| II. SUMMARY OF INTERVENTIONS | PAGE 3 |
| III. CONCLUSIONS | PAGE 6 |

I. BACKGROUND AND GENERAL INFORMATION

As a follow-up to the progress made during the 2023 administration, as part of the agreements reached during the Forum "Responding to the challenges of integration for the development of Latin America and the Caribbean. Proposals from the regional and subregional integration mechanisms," convened by CELAC in December 2022, the "Executive Meeting on Inter-Secretariat Work and the Declaration of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines" was held on 1 March 2024, both in virtual and face-to-face modalities.

The Permanent Secretariat of the Latin American and Caribbean Economic System (SELA) convened this event within the framework of the VIII Summit of CELAC, held on 1 and 2 March 2024, in Kingstown, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. The purpose of this executive meeting was to approve a Joint Declaration of the Secretariats, reaffirming the work conducted and the commitment to move forward, in addition to proposing an agenda and a schedule of meetings.

The secretaries and representatives of the following regional integration organisations participated: the Association of Caribbean States (ACS); the Andean Community (CAN); the Latin American Integration Association (ALADI); the Community of Caribbean States (CARICOM); the Central American Integration System (SICA); the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America - Peoples' Trade Agreement (ALBA-TCP), and the Latin American and Caribbean Economic System (SELA).

The meeting was opened by **Ambassador Clarems Endara, Permanent Secretary of SELA**, who welcomed the participants and expressed his gratitude for their participation in order to give continuity to the work on inter-secretariat convergence. He recalled the two purposes of this work: to avoid duplication of efforts and to seek regional convergence. He added that both objectives were to be achieved through two specific strategies: the holding of executive and technical meetings and the construction of thematic coincidence matrices. He pointed out that both strategies allowed positive progress to be made during the 2023 administration.

He informed that, within the framework of the CELAC Summit, a Joint Declaration of the Secretariats was prepared, which reaffirms the work conducted and the commitment to move forward. He also proposed to draw up and comply with a minimum schedule of meetings, as well as to create focal points to promote technical work. Finally, he submitted both the Joint Declaration of the Secretariats and the proposed timetable and schedule for consideration by the meeting.

The Declaration includes congratulations to Saint Vincent and the Grenadines for its work at the head of the Presidency Pro Tempore of CELAC and welcomes the government of Honduras as the current President Pro Tempore of the Community. The pivotal point is the issues that were agreed and that are being worked on, reaffirming the commitment to move forward. The second document presented is the schedule of meetings foreseen for the year 2024, which can be modified according to the agenda of each of the secretariats.

II. SUMMARY OF INTERVENTIONS

In response to the proposals, **Sergio Abreu, Secretary General of ALADI**, expressed his agreement with the Declaration and welcomed the incorporation of two issues that he considered particularly important, namely: social inclusion, which is fundamental in the region given the existing inequality, the highest in the world. He emphasised that the objective of our work is social inclusion as a fundamental result of integration efforts.

The second issue is that of digital tools. He expressed his concern about the current digital agendas because they tended to overlap and also lacked an element of coordination. He added that ALADI is working with small businesses that are in conditions of development for social inclusion and that it must be understood that if there is no investment, there is no trade, if there is no trade, there is no employment and if there is no employment, there is no social peace.

The Secretary General informed about the tools contemplated in the ALADI digital agenda, related to the digital certificate of origin; the digital signature that allows the recognition of the origin of goods and services; e-commerce; consumer protection and trade single windows.

Finally, Secretary Abreu highlighted the work conducted by SELA as extremely useful for coordination and for the objective of avoiding overlapping of activities. He noted that three issues need to be overcome in order to make progress in the integration process, namely: geography, asymmetry and ideology. Three elements, he said, that make the difference between the processes: geography, geopolitical proximity and, above all, economic asymmetries with large countries.

For his part, **Ambassador Gonzalo Gutiérrez Reinol, Secretary General of the Andean Community (CAN)**, was pleased with his first participation in the inter-secretariat work, noting his agreement with the Declaration and with what had been said on the issues of social and digital inclusion, to which he added security, an issue on which the Andean Community has been actively working. He pointed out that insecurity is affecting the democratic stability of many of the countries in the region and that, at the same time, transnational organised crime is directly threatening regional democratic institutions. In this regard, he informed that CAN has just approved a resolution action plan on this issue, aiming to go beyond the declarative level and seeking concrete actions.

ACS Secretary General, Rodolfo Sabonge, then pointed out that in the Caribbean region, progress has been made in projecting the issue of connectivity and in a project to improve physical connectivity. He added that, just as there can be no development without economic growth, there can be no development without transport and connectivity, and for this reason, for the Greater Caribbean region, it is an issue of the highest priority, since there can be no food security without good connectivity among all our countries.

He highlighted the representative nature of the participating organisations and pointed out that the current Troika could be considered that of Central America, South America and the Caribbean. He stressed that in the Caribbean a much greater effort is required than has been made in both physical and digital connectivity. He added that artificial intelligence must be taken into consideration in the fourth industrial revolution that is taking place. Likewise, he stressed the need to advance in knowledge and the application and use of these tools in order to avoid a new development gap. He highlighted the need to prioritise digital connectivity in order to move in the direction of artificial intelligence.

In conclusion, Secretary Sabonge pointed out that the Caribbean Sea is a specific area facing climate change because of the impact that this phenomenon has on the region. The impact, he added, has expansive effects, not only physically but also in terms of food survival, migration, tourism, biodiversity, and connectivity, among others. He placed special emphasis on sargassum and coral bleaching.

CARICOM Secretary General, Carla Barnett, in welcoming the invitation and the work being conducted, noted that many of the issues discussed are on the CARICOM agenda. She noted that climate change, physical integration, connectivity, and transport are issues that make up the strategic agenda of the Caribbean region. She therefore reaffirmed her commitment to the work and informed that a local CARICOM office will be established to function as a permanent liaison with the inter-secretariat work.

Afterwards, **Jorge Arreaza, Secretary General of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA-TCP)**, acknowledged the progress made in the inter-secretariat work under the coordination of SELA. He underscored the importance of knowing the work of the various organisations so as not to duplicate efforts. He said that the most important thing is that the secretariats and integration mechanisms are useful for CELAC as a whole.

He also recalled that this year marks the 200th anniversary of the convening of the Congress of Panama by the Liberator Simón Bolívar, which took place in 1826, but that its essential spirit remains in force, something that is reflected in the great strength shown by Saint Vincent and the Grenadines in holding the Presidency Pro Tempore of CELAC.

Regarding social inclusion, he pointed out that it is a fundamental issue for ALBA, and that integration is not only between states and governments, but also between peoples. Thus, the Alliance conducts many social inclusion programmes, such as the Miracle Mission, health programmes, planning programmes, as well as those related to physical and digital connectivity, among others.

As for artificial intelligence, he considered that, at some point, a code of ethics should be discussed, so that artificial intelligence does not take humanity by storm.

For her part, the representative of the Central American Integration System (SICA) expressed her gratitude for the invitation and greeted the highest authorities of the organisation. She pointed out that they had made some adjustments and clarifications to the Declaration, which are not substantive issues, but rather contributions to a better understanding of the document. She also ratified SICA's commitment to follow up and continue advancing with the inter-secretariat work.

III. CONCLUSIONS

After expressing his gratitude for the time and participation of the representatives of each secretariat, the Permanent Secretary of SELA said that all the proposals related to social inclusion, the digital agenda and security issues, among others, will be included in the final Declaration. Subsequently, during the day, they would be made public.

Likewise, given that there were no additions to the proposed calendar, the date of 28 June was set for a seminar and debate in the city of Tegucigalpa, Honduras.

Regarding the organisation of the pending meeting on cross-border cooperation and infrastructure, which could be organised by the Andean Community for the month of April, Ambassador Gutiérrez expressed that he would conduct the corresponding consultations and report back as soon as possible.

Finally, it was decided to hold a meeting of the technical team of focal points in March, with the objective of reviewing the matrices prepared and closing the calendar for the current administration.