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ENVIRONMENT MINISTERS APPROVE DECLARATION OF SANTA CRUZ

Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia—Concluding two days of dialogue on the complex issues of sustainable development, environmental protection, the management of resources and natural disasters, representatives of the 34 countries of the Organization of American States (OAS) today approved a declaration that will lay the groundwork for international cooperation to address these challenges.

The “Declaration of Santa Cruz + 10,” adopted by consensus by the First Inter-American Meeting of Ministers and High-Level Authorities on Sustainable Development, will provide a new tool for countries to work together to achieve shared goals. The document – whose title alludes to the 10-year anniversary of the Summit of the Americas on Sustainable Development, held in this same Bolivian city – contains a detailed strategic plan for improving the sustainable management of water, reducing the risks of natural disasters, and turning the promise of sustainable farm, forest and tourism practices into concrete results.

“It is clear that we need dramatically new approaches to translate sustainable development into actions that move us forward to achieving the Millennium Development Goals, which address with urgency the dual challenges facing this hemisphere—poverty and inequality,” noted Alfonso Quinónez, OAS Executive Secretary for Integral Development, who closed the meeting on behalf of Secretary General José Miguel Insulza. “This meeting marks an important step in moving the sustainable development agenda forward,” he added.

In adopting the Declaration of Santa Cruz, the ministers underscored the pivotal role that civil society and indigenous peoples play in shaping sustainable development efforts. Prior to the ministerial-level forum, a series of technical meetings and workshops were held with representatives from these groups aimed at strengthening their participation in the policymaking process. These talks resulted in a number of recommendations that were included in the Declaration.

“We will promote, within the framework of the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources, a broad public participation, including representation from the diverse sectors of society, public access to environmental information on nondiscriminatory basis with regards to gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, political, religious, or other opinion, as well as institutional transparency and the achievement of conditions that favor social development and democracy,” the final document states.

In his remarks, Quinónez assured the delegates that the OAS will continue to work with its member countries and partners such as the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank and the Pan-American Health Organization to tackle the global concerns related to the environment. Stressing the need for meaningful action in the near future, Quinónez reiterated that “our work in promoting sustainable development is not finished. We must take great care that diplomatic descriptions of the virtues of sustainable development reflect the imperative of adopting policies and programs that meet the urgent challenges facing this hemisphere.”
