

Statement by Alicia Bárcena, Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), at the opening session of the meeting on the Global Barometer Survey

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Alberto van Klaveren, Under Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Government of Chile
Members of the Board of Directors of the International Advisory Committee of the Latinobarómetro Corporation,

Distinguished international experts affiliated to the Global Barometer Network,

Dear Marta Lagos, Director of Latinobarómetro

ECLAC colleagues,

Welcome to ECLAC, place and home of all the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean. ECLAC is very pleased to host this meeting on the Global Barometer Survey, in the framework of the cooperation agreement between the Commission and the Latinobarómetro Corporation.

This agreement has led to a fruitful working relationship, which has led to the inclusion in Latinobarómetro measurements of modules on equity, social cohesion and youth, very important issues in the field of public social policy in Latin America and the Caribbean.

WHY IS PUBLIC PERCEPTION MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER?

One of the main areas in which the globalization process has advanced in recent decades has been in the spread of ethical principles and values, such as human rights, equity, democracy, respect for ethnic and cultural diversity, and the right to live in a healthy environment that we can pass on to future generations. This entails the recognition of each and every member of global society as being entitled to certain rights and, as such, as a global citizen. The practical implementation of these principles is still, however, very limited.

Given the sharp inequalities and asymmetries of the global order, public accountability is probably the most important tool to strengthen democracy and fair governance at the global level. The provision of information and transparency is probably the only mechanism to invite more citizenship and to provide a balance between the State, the Market and the Citizen particularly to support efforts to reduce poverty and inequalities.

The Global barometer Surveys (GBS) is the first comprehensive effort to measure, at a mass level, the current social, political, and economic atmosphere around the world. It provides an independent, non-partisan, multidisciplinary view of public opinion on a range of policy-relevant issues.

After six consecutive years of economic growth, in the last quarter of 2008, the financial crisis in developed countries spread to the region, impacting particularly on the real economy and especially in the trade area. The crisis struck a region that was much better prepared than it was during prior crises with regard to macroeconomic issues: its economies were growing without interruption, they had lowered most public debt and they had accumulated international reserves.

This has allowed some countries -although to different extents - [react](#) in a way that had been impossible on previous occasions, implementing countercyclical policies and adopting measures to mitigate the effects of the crisis on the most vulnerable population.

Nevertheless, ECLAC draws attention to the significant deterioration of the macro and fiscal margins over recent months due to worsening average fiscal results in the region - the average estimated decrease in public incomes is about 1,8% of GDP. This deterioration may endanger the sustainability and duration of anti-crisis measures implemented in many countries.

The impact of the economic crisis in the region has been much more commercial than financial. For the region to recover growth, integration is important in order to revitalize domestic markets. However, this process is deeply influenced by politics.

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Latin America and the Caribbean will contract 1.9% this year, raising unemployment to 9% and aggravating poverty levels. Lower external demand led to a 30% value and 7% volume fall in exports during the first quarter of this year with regard to the same period in 2008. Remittances also dropped (5%-10% between the fourth quarter of 2008 and the first quarter of 2009). Foreign direct investment flows are expected to decrease 40% this year due to the general deterioration of family and business expectations, which negatively affected consumer and investment decisions in the private sector.

A current account deficit equivalent to 2.3% of GDP is expected for 2009, compared to the 0.6% of GDP deficit obtained in 2008. The terms of trade will also fall 10.8% this year, from a 3.0% increase in 2008.

All of this has impacted the labor market. From early 2008 to the first quarter of 2009, over a million people have lost their jobs in urban areas, an inter-annual rise in unemployment of 0.6%. The unemployment rate is expected to increase from 7.4% in 2008 to about 9% this year, leaving an additional three million people without work. This will be accompanied by greater labor informality, which will aggravate poverty levels and make compliance of the Millennium Development Goals more difficult.

The inclusion in the survey of a module on equity has generated valuable information on the views, perceptions and attitudes of the population of Latin America in relation to issues such as the distribution of wealth and the functioning of the structure of opportunities, both crucial issues for the design of public social policies which will have

the maximum impact in terms of reducing poverty and reducing disparities in income distribution.

Considering the themes of social cohesion and youth has been positive, since it has led to a very important research activity for institution-building and the achievement of ever higher levels of democracy with inclusion and a sense of belonging.

The agreement between ECLAC and Latinobarómetro has enabled us to make use of information collected through opinion polls, providing data which are highly interesting for a wider analysis of the major challenges —equity, strengthening of democracy and social cohesion— which are facing the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. Work on those sources of information has provided inputs for some of ECLAC publications, including recent documents on social cohesion and the 2007 and 2008 editions of the *Social Panorama of Latin America*.

We are well aware of the fact that, in order to make better use of the information provided by Latinobarómetro, greater analytical efforts are needed in order to progressively optimize all the processes involved in the research effort, be it the design of procedures and instruments for the collection of information or its analysis and interpretation. Therefore, with the valuable support of the Spanish International Cooperation Agency for Development (AECID), ECLAC and Latinobarómetro are conducting a study on the relationship between household survey indicators and those based on opinion polls. This attempt to reconcile our sources will certainly be complex, but its results will be certainly useful for similar efforts in the other regions of the world.

I believe these two days of meetings and lively discussions will be highly fruitful and will shed new light for the selection of themes and issues to be dealt with by the various Barómetro surveys in the regions of the world.

Thank you and welcome once again.