

EU-CELAC summit, 17-18 July 2023

ETUC and TUCA joint trade union statement on the need to include workers' interests

The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and the Trade Union Confederation of Americas (TUCA), representing 45 million workers in the EU and 55 million workers in the Americas countries respectively, welcome a closer partnership between our continents.

Today, more than ever, we claim that this renewed partnership must be founded on shared objectives, including the pursuit of peace, the defense of democracy and human rights, and the redistribution of wealth and equality.

Closer cooperation and trade between our regions must lead to the creation of good quality jobs for the benefit of our workers and our societies. Trade and investment relations between our two regions must not reproduce an international division of labor that leaves LAC countries in the role of extracting raw materials and producing with low added value to supply the EU.

While the security of energy supply is indeed of a crucial importance for the ecological transition of both parties, special attention should be paid to the workers and local communities in the energy supply chain, including the ones in the extractive industries.

The history of the relationship between Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean is characterized by migratory flows between both regions. The recognition of the rights of migrants is a fundamental demand for the trade union movement. Migration and asylum policies must not criminalise migrants. We demand migration and asylum policies based on solidarity, responsibility, the application of international laws, standards and conventions and full respect of human rights.

The socio-economic situation of workers in the EU outermost regions in LAC is also critical while the application of the EU social acquis there may also be challenged. The interests of workers in these regions must be taken into account by the EU, including in the framework of the EU-CELAC partnership. Strengthening cooperation between LAC and the EU outermost regions, as proposed in the new agenda for relations between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean published on the 7th of June 2023, must clearly lead to the improvement of living and working conditions of all workers in LAC, including in EU outermost regions in LAC.

Association and Trade Agreements must include Social Conditionalities

Respect of trade union rights, as defined by the ILO, is paramount. This is not about one region imposing its social model on the other, but jointly upholding agreed international standards.

Thus, the trade partnership must contain binding and enforceable conditions in relation to international labour standards and must create an environment where freedom of association can be exercised free from fear and retaliation, that recognises the role of trade unions, that is conducive to social dialogue and where social partners can negotiate autonomously.

These are the hallmarks of the kind of sustainable development our respective organisations and their members support. Any trade agreement should promote the development of the Latin America and Caribbean region.

It is also essential to define binding global rules the responsibilities of transnational companies throughout the production chain. We urge governments to advance in the negotiations of the Binding Treaty on Transnational Corporations and Human Rights, within the framework of the United Nations Human Rights Council; and on both regions to prepare for the implementation of the EU Directive on corporate sustainability due diligence and for national legislation that guarantees the respect of human rights in transnational business operations.

We strongly condemn the blockade that imposes inhuman restrictions on Cuban society and the inclusion of the country on the list of countries that sponsor terrorism. Cuban people need solidarity.

Social Dialogue and involvement of trade unions is essential

In this light we deeply regret that trade unions were not given the opportunity to have an exchange with the leaders at the EU-CELAC summit 2023. We demand that going forward, and as a follow-up to this summit, there is a better and structured integration of trade unions in the dialogue between our regions.

This participation, along with genuinely incorporating workers' interests, is critical to increase public acceptance of trade deals and to mitigate potential adverse effects. This renewed partnership should lead to more prosperous and equitable societies and include social measures to support workers in the sectors that are losing out. We demand the development of public, universal, comprehensive, non-discriminatory and fairly funded social protection systems, with adequate benefits where these do not already exist.

The Association Agreements so far have focused on the commercial pillar and future agreements are at risk of even splitting it off completely from the wider political pillar. The monitoring and follow-up mechanisms therein do not take into account the social impacts or the fulfillment of human rights. During the periods of implementation of these agreements, we observed serious violations of human and labor rights in Mexico, Guatemala, Colombia, and Peru, without effective remediation mechanisms within these Agreements.

The abundant natural resources of the Latin American and Caribbean region cannot be simple currencies of commercial and financial exchange. The region's contribution to their preservation must also be at the service of sustainable development, which places employment and decent work at the centre, with the participation of communities, populations and workers in building a model of just transition for a clean energy mix and at the service of the many and not the few.

Respect and include the Labour Forum

Workers on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean stand in solidarity with each other to condemn hate speech, nationalism, wars and divisions. We prioritize the defense of workers' interests, independently from governments. For this reason, in 2020 we established the Labour Forum: to strengthen the participation of trade unions in the EU-CELAC relationship, as a platform for dialogue with the European Commission and CELAC governments.

The Forum promotes the interest and capacity of trade unionists in the processes of regional integration, social dialogue, gender equality, migration and other issues. This Forum also evaluates the impacts of trade agreements on labour relations, on employment and on social rights, and especially on compliance with ILO Conventions.

We commit to the revival of this Forum and call on the EU and CELAC governments to recognise it as a legitimate and representative actor in this partnership, and to engage in preparation and follow-up of EU and CELAC meetings.

Today's geopolitical challenges demand a structural response, built with and for working people. We believe that bi-regional relations can contribute to this objective, and we call on the governments of the EU and CELAC to listen to workers and prioritize their needs.