

# JOINT LETTER ON THE EU-CELAC SUMMIT AND THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

To: **HR/VP Josep Borell, Commissioner for International Partnerships Jutta Urpilainen**

cc: **Javier Niño Pérez, Félix Fernández Shaw**

Brussels, February 23, 2023

Dear HR/VP Borell and Commissioner Urpilainen,

Our organisations, as members of the EU-LAC Group[1], express our support for the relaunching of bi-regional relations between Latin America and the Caribbean and the European Union, and endorse the public statements, expressed at the highest level, on the importance of these relations.

Our organisations agree on the importance as well as the complementarity that CSOs and European institutions share, as repeatedly pointed out by HR/VP Josep Borrell, including "the crucial role of civil society in their own countries, as well as in multilateral fora"[...].[2]

In this regard, on June 19, 2017, the Council of the EU adopted its Conclusions on Engagement with Civil Society in External Relations[3], in which it recognises the multiple and diverse roles that civil society organisations (CSOs) play as promoters of democracy, defenders of the rule of law, social justice and human rights. It states that CSOs are key, not only for the promotion of shared values between the two regions, but also for the fulfilment of the EU's Global Strategy and the 2030 Agenda.

Moreover, the 2019 Joint Communication "The European Union, Latin America and the Caribbean: Joining forces for a common future"[4] recognises the fundamental role of CSOs and their capacity to promote a rights based agenda and encourage government accountability and transparency.

However, despite the existing regulations and the EU's recognition of and commitment to CSO participation, the EEAS and the European Commission have not established and implemented effective mechanisms within the framework of EU-LAC relations to fulfil this responsibility and ensure meaningful CSO participation[5].

CSOs were not consulted in any way in the drafting process of the EU-CELAC Roadmap 2022-2023 "Renewing the bi-regional partnership to strengthen peace and sustainable development", and will only be taken into account in an activity called "EU-CELAC Youth and Civil Society Dialogue Week (date and place to be defined)". Despite numerous requests from CSOs, it has not been possible to obtain information on the objectives, planning and organisation of this activity. Furthermore, the "informal" consultation launched on 31 January 2023 by DG INTPA via email to a small number of CSOs that are part of the Policy Forum on Development lacked the necessary transparency and dissemination. It should be added that on previous occasions, our EU-LAC group, which currently encompasses a significant number of organisations and networks active in the framework of EU-Latin American relations, has been actively involved in the preparation and implementation of the Summits.

Therefore, we urgently call on the European Commission and the EEAS to develop, in cooperation with the CSOs of the two regions, a genuine process of effective and meaningful participation guided by the principles of transparency and accessibility, which would substantially contribute to the stated objective of strengthening and deepening EU-LAC relations in all areas.

On behalf of the EU-LAC Group, we would like to reaffirm our commitment and we remain at your disposal to cooperate, contribute and develop jointly with the European institutions to design, plan and implement the processes of consultation and participation of CSOs, both before and during the EU-CELAC Summit, as well as to follow up on the established commitments and agreements to ensure not only the plurality and success of this Summit, but also the future of the latter.

## MEMBERS OF EU-LAC WORKING GROUP:

1. ACTIONAID
2. CARITAS EU
3. CIDSE
4. CNCDC – 11.11.11
5. CONCORD
6. COORDINADORA ESPAÑOLA DE ONGS
7. COSPE ITALIA
8. ETUC
9. EU-LAT NETWORK
10. FRIEDRICH EBERT STIFTUNG
11. FRIENDS OF THE EARTH EU
12. HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG
13. ITUC
14. JUSTICE ET PAIX
15. OXFAM
16. ONCE
17. OIDHACO
18. PAX CHRISTI
19. PEOPLE IN NEED
20. PBI GUATEMALA
21. PLATAFORMA EUROPA-PERU
22. RACE AND EQUALITY
23. REDCROSS EU
24. SOLIDAR
25. SOLSOC
26. SOS CHILDRENS VILLAGES INT.
27. WETLANDS INT. EUROPE
28. WSM
29. 11.11.11

[1] The European Civil Society Working Group on EU-Latin America and Caribbean Relations (in short, the EU-LAC Working Group) is an informal platform that brings together European networks and organisations, and was formed in 2014 with the aim of organising a civil society forum in Brussels for the EU-CELAC Summit.

[2] [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/world-ngo-day-statement-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-2\\_en?s=196&etran=es](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/world-ngo-day-statement-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-2_en?s=196&etran=es)

[3] <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/24003/st10279en17-conclusions-eu-engagement-with-civil-society-in-external-relations.pdf>

[4] <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/ES/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52019JC0006&from=ES>

[5] <https://concordeurope.org/resource/7-practices-for-civil-society-participation-in-eu-decision-making/>