

Joint public statement

The EU should prioritize human rights in deepening relations with LAC

17 April 2023

Ahead of the [forthcoming Joint Communication](#) on relations between the European Union (EU) and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), the signatory organizations urge the EU and its member states to prioritize human rights in EU-LAC relations.

Following on the EU-CELAC Ministerial meeting in October 2022, the EU High Representative Josep Borrell [affirmed](#) the importance of stepping up work between the two regions to realize their joint potential.¹

While noting “growing geopolitical tensions” with the conflict in Ukraine, HR/VP Borrell [outlined](#) four areas of action for EU and CELAC, including to “[collaborate] in the promotion of a rules-based global order, based on peace, democracy and human rights.”²

At the same time, the EU and its member states recently recognized³ the “democratic backsliding in some LAC countries and on human rights... [a]t the same time [...] a more subtle increase in the restrictions of the freedom of expression and the rule of law in some countries of the region.”

Indeed, the situation across the LAC region is as urgent as ever for human rights and those who defend them – once again this year, reports show that LAC remains the deadliest region for human rights defenders in the world.⁴

Our organizations strongly encourage the EU and its member states to take the opportunity of their renewed ties with the LAC region to deliver on their stated human rights commitments. Human rights should lie at the centre of the forthcoming Joint Communication and of EU-LAC relations, mainstreamed across all issues and countries, not only as one of multiple priorities.

We call on the EU to **ensure the genuine consultation of civil society** ahead of and during the July 2023 EU-CELAC Summit and in the wider relations between the two regions as they deepen their ties across multiple areas of cooperation.⁵

The EU agenda and strategy for relations with LAC must be anchored in both regions’ shared international human rights commitments, including all civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. At a crucial moment where human rights are embattled in both regions and worldwide, the EU and its member states must redouble efforts to address the impact of human rights violations and discriminatory practices in LAC, empowering rights holders to claim their rights (protecting and expanding civic space) and calling out duty bearing states to fulfil their obligations, guided by the principles of universality, indivisibility, equality and non-discrimination, participation and accountability.

¹ See also [Cumbre Iberoamericana: Intervención del Alto Representante/Vicepresidente Josep Borrell durante la Cumbre en República Dominicana](#), 25 March 2023.

² 1) Intensifying political dialogue at the highest level, 2) Modernizing and completing the network of trade and association agreements between the two regions, 3) Converging around joint priorities (Advancing the digital revolution, Enhancing economic development, Creating cohesive societies by fighting inequality, Fighting climate change) and 4) Collaborating in the promotion of a rules-based global order, based on peace, democracy and human rights.

³ In a non-public orientation note of 27 March 2023 ahead of the COREPER discussion of 29 March.

⁴ See Amnesty International, [Annual Report Americas Regional Overview](#), 28 March 2023; Front Line Defenders, [Global Analysis 2022](#), 3 April 2023; Human Rights Watch, [Americas: Address Poverty, Corruption, Insecurity](#), 12 January 2023; Regionar, [América Latina y el Caribe: Una lectura compartida sobre el contexto que enfrentamos en nuestra región](#), November 2022.

⁵ See also EU-LAC working group, [Joint Letter on the EU-CELAC Summit and the Role of Civil Society](#), 23 February 2023.

In the forthcoming Joint Communication, as well as in the lead-up to and during the EU-CELAC Summit, **the EU and its member states should send a clear political signal of their commitment to human rights and ensure a comprehensive, robust and strategic approach to some of the most pressing human rights situations in the region.**

Across Latin America and the Caribbean, our organizations have documented how **human rights defenders (HRDs)** continue to be attacked and killed, and subjected to threats, harassment, criminal prosecution or arbitrary arrest simply for doing their work. Across the region, Indigenous, Afro-descendent and LGBTIQ+ HRDs, as well as those working on issues of territory, land and environment, face heightened risk of discrimination and attacks.

In addition, the work of HRDs and civil society organizations is becoming more challenging in many countries, with states in the region enacting restrictive NGO laws, criminalising human rights work, stigmatising HRDs or other individuals or groups working with civil society, making it difficult to access international and even national funding and/or shutting down NGOs completely.

Over the past few years, civil society, social movements and activists have increasingly taken to the streets to **protest and claim their rights**; yet many have been met with disproportionate state responses and the excessive use of force.

Journalists and members of civil society across the globe find themselves subject to **unlawful targeted surveillance**, including in the LAC region – to date, there is little indication that this has been diligently investigated.

Arbitrary detentions remain widespread in the region, with those held often tortured or otherwise ill-treated and, in some cases, subjected to enforced disappearance or deprived of liberty.

Additionally, profound human rights and humanitarian crises throughout the region led to **sharp increases in the numbers of people leaving their countries in search of protection.**

In Latin America and the Caribbean, states consistently fail to protect women and girls from entrenched **gender-based violence** and to address impunity for these crimes, and to tackle discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender identity or sexual orientation.

Finally, at the global level, the EU and LAC are challenged to **work jointly to defend and promote regional and international human rights systems** as they increasingly come under attack, reversing years of gains.

Recommendations

In the forthcoming Joint Communication and across all their relations with the LAC states, including the upcoming summit, the EU and its member states should redouble their efforts for human rights in the LAC region and work with their LAC counterparts to deliver on shared commitments in practice:

- **Put human rights at the centre of EU-LAC relations** and ensure a human rights-based approach across all policymaking and cooperation, including committing to the pro-active consultation and inclusion of civil society on key policy developments;
- **Protect human rights defenders and civil society**, in line with the EU [Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders](#), fostering an enabling environment for their work and ensure that the situation of and issues raised by HRDs – in particular women human rights defenders – and civil society are mainstreamed across EU-LAC relations and raised at the highest political level and remain at the heart of EU's engagement with third countries;

- **Explicitly stand for the right to peaceful protest** in the LAC region, condemning and acting to counter the excessive use of force in the context of peaceful protests, and call for genuine accountability when grave human rights violations take place;
- **Mainstream human rights into all discussions on the EU-LAC Digital Alliance**, ensuring greater due diligence on use of technologies, including digital surveillance technologies. At the same time, support and implement an immediate moratorium on the export, sale, transfer, servicing and use of digital surveillance technologies until rigorous human rights safeguards are put in place to regulate such practices;
- Ensure that **civil society and HRDs are fully involved and genuinely consulted** in the development and implementation of EU trade, association and other agreements with countries in the LAC region as well as in human rights and political dialogues and other exchanges with LAC counterparts up to highest level;
- **Re-affirm the universality and indivisibility of human rights in EU-LAC relations and in engagement of the EU and LAC member states at multilateral level**; in this spirit, cooperate to robustly defend and promote multilateral human rights mechanisms and fora and their important work;
- **Support and provide full political backing up to the highest levels for work to address gender equality in the LAC region**, including stepping up work to counter sexual and gender-based violence and femicides while taking proactive steps toward gender equality;
- **Implement the actions contained in the [EU Action Plan](#) on Human Rights and Democracy, notably by promoting the right to a fair trial and the strengthening of independent and impartial judiciary**, especially relevant in the context of cases affecting human rights defenders;
- **Include concrete commitments on the fight against discrimination and related intolerance in the new agenda for EU-LAC relations** with a view to addressing inequality in the region and in line with the EU [Guidelines on Non-discrimination in External Action](#) (2019) and the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy.

Signatories

ActionAid International

Amnesty International

Christian Solidarity Worldwide

Civil Rights Defenders

EU-LAT Network

Front Line Defenders

Human Rights Watch

International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)

International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT)

Protection International

Race and Equality

EU-LAC Group

- 11.11.11.
- Aidsfonds
- Brot fur die Welt
- CIDSE
- CNCD 11.11.11.
- CONCORD
- COSPE
- ETUC
- Fundación Ebert
- Heinrich Böll Foundation
- ITUC
- Justice et Paix
- La Coordinadora de ONG España
- Oidhaco
- OMCT
- ONCE
- Oxfam
- Pax Christi International
- PBI Guatemala
- People In Need
- Plataforma Europa-Perú (PEP)
- Solidar
- Solidarité Socialiste
- Wetlands International
- Wide+
- WSM
- WWF