

# INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY REPORT 2017-2018



**CUPE** / Canadian Union  
of Public Employees

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Managing Editor: Catherine Louli

Editorial Assistants:  
Manon Lajoie, Rose de Tourris

Graphic Design: Jocelyn Renaud

International Solidarity Officer:  
Kelti Cameron  
[kcameron@cupe.ca](mailto:kcameron@cupe.ca)

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# INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

## A YEAR IN REVIEW

International solidarity connects us with workers across borders who share a common struggle for accessible public services, decent work, and safety and security in their lives. CUPE's international solidarity report highlights important international struggles and the ways we are building and strengthening relationships with labour and social movements in other countries. In this report, you will learn about the Global Justice Fund as well as examples of CUPE's worker-to-worker solidarity over the past year.

CUPE's international solidarity work in 2017-2018 expanded to include new relationships in Guatemala, Haiti, Iran, and with migrant workers in Canada. We continued to strengthen worker-to-worker solidarity with our long-standing trade union and social movement partners in Colombia, Cuba, Honduras, Nicaragua, and the Philippines.

Peoples' movements in Colombia, Honduras, Iran and the Philippines, among others, are growing and organizing to build the power needed to challenge repressive corporate and political leadership. Over the past year, we looked at how the Canadian Government and our corporate sector may be complicit in some of the repression these movements are experiencing.

Oxfam reported in January 2018 that "eighty-two per cent of global wealth generated last year went to the richest one per cent, while the 3.7 billion people who make up the poorest half of the world saw no increase." As the gap between the rich and the poor grows, people's economic and social conditions are declining. The conditions are ripe for resistance, here in Canada, and globally.

As workers around the globe are challenging privatization, poverty, austerity, corruption and war, CUPE is making every effort to unite and to support these workers wherever they are in the world.



*Mark H.*



*Charles Fleury.*



# INTERNATIONAL MEETINGS

International trade and investment





Unions and social movement groups from Mexico, US and Canada met in Montreal in 2018 to raise concerns about the ongoing re-negotiation of NAFTA. CUPE is a member of Common Frontiers, the Trade Justice Network and the Réseau québécois sur l'intégration continentale (RQIC) coalitions that organized and participated in this meeting. The meeting brought together groups who have been working together since the inception of NAFTA in the early 1990s and who have long criticized the agreement from the perspective of workers, farmers, Indigenous people, women, environmentalists, and human rights defenders.

Civil society groups amplified their call for a NAFTA replacement that would genuinely improve peoples' livelihoods and protect the environment in all three countries. They further committed to forging and strengthening their solidarity across borders, something deemed particularly urgent for the labour movement in Mexico.

Workers in Mexico work the longest hours for the lowest pay among all countries in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). NAFTA has done nothing to raise their standard of living. On the contrary, NAFTA is forcing many into precarious informal work or to migrate out of the country in search of decent work. Mexican workers desperately need legislation that guarantees

their right to freedom of association and collective bargaining. They are fighting hard against proposed legislation that will weaken workers' rights by locking in low wages and poor working conditions, and undermine efforts to negotiate collective agreements.

In Canada, the Trudeau government is continuing the Harper government's policy of pursuing free trade agreements with as many other countries as possible. In addition to NAFTA, several other major deals are currently in the pipeline, including with China, India and with a group of nations in Latin America that will be known as MERCOSUR. The government is paying lip-service to the groundswell of opposition to these trade deals by promising to make them "progressive" by including enforceable chapters on labour rights, the environment, women's rights and Indigenous rights. But the truth is that none of this has panned out in the negotiations so far. The Canada-Chile agreement is one of the only trade agreements with a gender chapter, and it demonstrates how ineffective it is to try to use trade agreements to change social policy.

There is a groundswell of opposition to free trade agreements. By uniting in our opposition, we will have a greater impact. Fair trade, not free trade, is what is needed.



## **PUBLIC SERVICES INTERNATIONAL (PSI) 30<sup>TH</sup> WORLD CONGRESS**

People Over Profit was the theme of the Public Services International 30<sup>th</sup> World Congress in Geneva, Switzerland. CUPE has been an active affiliate of PSI for over 50 years and participated in the global gathering in November 2017.

Public Services International (PSI) is a global trade union federation representing over 20 million women and men working in public services around the world. They represent more than 650 unions in 148 countries and territories.

The World Congress was an opportunity for leaders and activists to come together to share strategies and build unity to promote quality public services and defend trade union rights.

Delegates adopted a Program of Action that sets out objectives for the next five years. The focus is on defending strong democratic states and an inclusive society that is committed to ensuring gender equality, respect and dignity for all. The plan argues for the pursuit of economic development for the benefit of all, the redistribution of wealth, and strengthened workers' power.

CUPE's resolution on Canada's Anti-Terror Act 2015 (Bill C-51) was well received by the congress. Governments around the world have used the "war on terror" to justify their violation of civil liberties and restrictions on the

right to protest. The experiences of our allies in countries such as Colombia, the Philippines, and Turkey show that trade unionists who are fighting against union busting are labelled as national security threats. The same is true for Indigenous activists who are threatened because they are resisting multinational mining companies who are stealing their land.

## **UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN (UNCSW)**

This past March, CUPE joined an international labour delegation to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in New York City. The delegation called on governments across the world to make meaningful commitments to gender equality and women's rights.

They lobbied governments to include labour's priorities in the Agreed Conclusions, a document of commitments which they negotiate at the meeting. Union women's input is critical in this process given the influence of corporate and conservative interests in the UN system.

The delegation worked to ensure commitments by governments to uphold core labour rights, including the right to organize and form a union, the right to bargain collectively and the right to equal pay for work of equal value. Although these rights are protected in Conventions of the International

Labour Organization (ILO), governments need to do much better in upholding them.

Delegates advocated for strong commitments to quality public services, like child care, education and health care, and progressive government taxation systems to support them. Women count on public services to support them in their communities and as a source of good jobs, and it is typically women who do the unpaid care work when quality public services aren't available.

A big focus of the labour delegation was mobilizing support for the global campaign on gender-based violence. Using the hashtag #StopGBVatWork delegates called for a new ILO Convention on gender-based violence in the world of work. Gender-based violence profoundly threatens workers' safety and wellbeing. In June 2018, the ILO will hold a first discussion on developing a possible new Convention.





# WORKER- TO-WORKER SOLIDARITY

## MIGRANT WORKERS

CUPE's Global Justice Fund supports the KAIROS migrant justice project. KAIROS is an ecumenical movement for ecological justice and human rights. The focus of this project is to bring migrant workers, unions, community groups, churches, and service agencies together. Through dialogue and action their aim is to strengthen the rights and capacity of foreign migrant workers, to alleviate poverty and exploitive working conditions, as well as advocate for justice and equality between Canadians and foreign migrant worker communities.



Immigration policy in Canada is changing at a rapid pace. This project provides a platform for migrant workers to develop relationships of mutual support and solidarity. Over the past year, a series of migrant justice needs assessment and capacity building workshops, as well as migrant justice forums were held across the country. These initiatives brought together Indigenous peoples, diaspora communities, migrants and their advocates, in action towards transformative change on migrant justice issues.

Like other newcomers to Canada, foreign migrant workers often lack access to information and face challenges including language barriers, exploitation, and instances of abuse and gender violence. Migrant workers in the low-skilled streams are particularly vulnerable due to their temporary status, their dependence on a single employer tied to their work permits, and gaps in the enforcement of contracts and

flaws in the rules and regulations of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP).

Changes to the TFWP demonstrate the policy shift from an immigration model based on elevating permanent residency to a labour model that increasingly relies on migrant workers who will be permitted only temporary residence in Canada.

Under the current TFWP program, workers are separated from their families for extended periods of time, which contradicts Canadian values that emphasize strong families and family reunification. Because of their temporary immigration status, workers are also often subjected to abuse and exploitation, a fact that has been widely documented over the years and underscores the urgency to revise the program to ensure that workers' rights are upheld, and their welfare protected.

In Canada, the health of temporary foreign workers is of vital importance, as they contribute to the growth and development of Canadian society. Stronger policies that establish full protection and rights for workers are needed to prevent abuse and exploitation, and to promote their wellbeing. The migrant justice project intends to support the alliances that are necessary to strengthen migrant workers' power to realize these goals.

## HAITI

Life is very difficult for most Haitian people. Organizing in the trade union movement is fraught with challenges that leaders and workers are trying to overcome. One of the biggest challenges is that the political and economic decisions of the country are deeply influenced by national and foreign governments, the corporate sector and international NGO actors that are proponents of privatized public services and open and unregulated markets.

CUPE participated in a trade union delegation to Haiti in July 2017 hosted by the Confédération des travailleurs et travailleuses des secteurs public et privé (CTSP). We met with workers and members from the energy, health, and education sectors. They shared their experience of mass jobs loss, privatization, and underfunding of public services. Underlying this difficult situation is trade union harassment and repression.





However, the labour movement is being revitalized through renewed organizing efforts, and the government and employers in the country are starting to take notice. Several labour leaders are being targeted and harassed by individuals some suspect may be private militia hired by employers. Leaders involved in the textile industry are calling for a higher minimum wage, in addition to food subsidies, enhanced public transport, and construction of social housing. These appeals are garnering international attention, and placing pressure on owners and employers to comply.

The CTSP is focused on the struggle of domestic workers in the country. The union is encouraging them to confront the struggles they face in the workplace, the union, and in society.

CUPE National last visited the CTSP in 2011 to support the reconstruction efforts of the union

office following the devastating earthquake in 2010. The initiative was led by Public Services International (PSI), and supported by CUPE and PSAC. Following our recent visit, it is clear the office has become a hub of activity and is a central meeting point for workers in Port-au-Prince, and elsewhere in Haiti.

## COLOMBIA

The Colombian government signed peace agreements in the autumn of 2016, but troubles remain.

Armed paramilitary forces connected to large landowners and corporate economic interests are active throughout the country and have been linked to the murder of over 125 social movement activists since the signing of the accords. These abuses continue despite the disarmament of the FARC (a national liberation movement) and they are challenging people's aspiration for genuine

## ◀ COLOMBIA

peace that ultimately addresses the social and economic roots of the armed conflict.

In other words, peace deals have been signed, but peace has not yet been achieved. That's why CUPE and other Canadian unions continue their solidarity work with Colombian workers and Indigenous and African-Colombian communities through the Frontlines initiative.

For over 15 years, Frontlines has been organizing worker-to-worker solidarity exchanges with Colombian popular organizations that focus on supporting the peace process and exposing the negative impacts of Canadian investors and deregulated economic policies, including the Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement. The goal of all our delegations is to build mutual solidarity between public sector workers in Canada and Colombia in our mutual fight to stop the privatization of public services and to support the right of Indigenous communities to preserve and access their ancestral land.

In February 2018 Frontlines sent a Canadian labour delegation to Colombia that included CUPE, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW), the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) and the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC). The delegation heard how Canadian resource extraction and military procurement agreements are

threatening the livelihoods of farmers, Indigenous peoples and Afro-Colombians.

In the Port City of Buenaventura, delegates met with leaders from the civil strike committee, who shut down the largest port in the country for 22 days to demand basic public services. Many leaders we met clarified that they are not victims of the armed conflict, but of an unjust economic development model. Communities continue to resist displacement as multinational corporations move onto their land or demand port and highway expansions to facilitate the movement of goods.

The delegation came away with a deeper understanding of how privatization, land grabs and massive dislocation of the rural population continue to be commonplace. The delegation also

learned how communities and unions that resist are being criminalized and silenced, either through legislation, the justice system and/or paramilitary violence.

CUPE, along with its Canadian partner unions, continues to work to shed light on the situation in Colombia. Leaders in Colombia need our support and solidarity now more than ever.

## IRAN

In more than a decade of activism, union members of the Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company have overcome many difficulties and incurred heavy costs for their commitment to the trade union, including intimidation, persecution and imprisonment. Nevertheless, the union has continued to be active in protecting the rights

and interests of workers at the Vahed Company. Accordingly, the Vahed Syndicate and its members have become the target of state aggression and have received heavy prison sentences intended to stop their progress in protecting workers' rights.

Reza Shahabi, a board member of the bus workers' syndicate, was released from prison in March 2018 after being imprisoned for trade union activities since June 2010. In the months leading to his release, the union participated in three large demonstrations with allied workers' organizations, teachers, students and women.

The privatization of the Vahed Company and the anti-worker amendments to the existing labour law, and the delayed housing project for Vahed workers are priority campaigns for the union.





The union coordinated a series of actions against cut backs and non-payment of benefits to bus workers that included a day of action by all bus drivers.

Workers and the poor in Iran urgently need international solidarity to help strengthen workers' and social justice movements, and stave off interference by the US administration and its allies.

## PHILIPPINES

Since Rodrigo Duterte assumed the post as President of the Republic of the Philippines in 2016, the Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT) has been actively pushing for meaningful reforms for the education sector and Philippine society in general.

ACT welcomed President Duterte's initial pronouncement against the use of contract labour, and the promise of doubling the basic pay of public school teachers, genuine land reform, and industrialization of the countryside. These are all issues close to ACT's heart.

However once elected, President Duterte abandoned his promises. In turn, ACT has launched campaigns to advance the interests of the students, teachers, non-teaching personnel and the public. Opposition to contract labour and the privatization of education, and the call for a just and living wage continues.

A campaign launched by the *Save Our Schools Network* in solidarity with the Indigenous Lumad communities in Mindanao has the active support of ACT. They have mobilized their chapters and networks to help advance efforts to stop the militarization of Lumad schools and communities.

Through its *ACT for Peace* campaign, ACT broadly called for the resumption of peace talks between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP). In November 2017, President Duterte arbitrarily cancelled the talks.

With the cancellation of the peace negotiations, the ongoing human rights violations worsened. President Duterte issued his so-called "terrorist list" at the beginning of 2018. It included several human rights defenders and activists, including ACT's Regional Coordinator Jeanette Ribaya-Cawiding. In the current context, it is understood that the list will be used by the government to go after its political dissenters and those who oppose government policy.

## HONDURAS

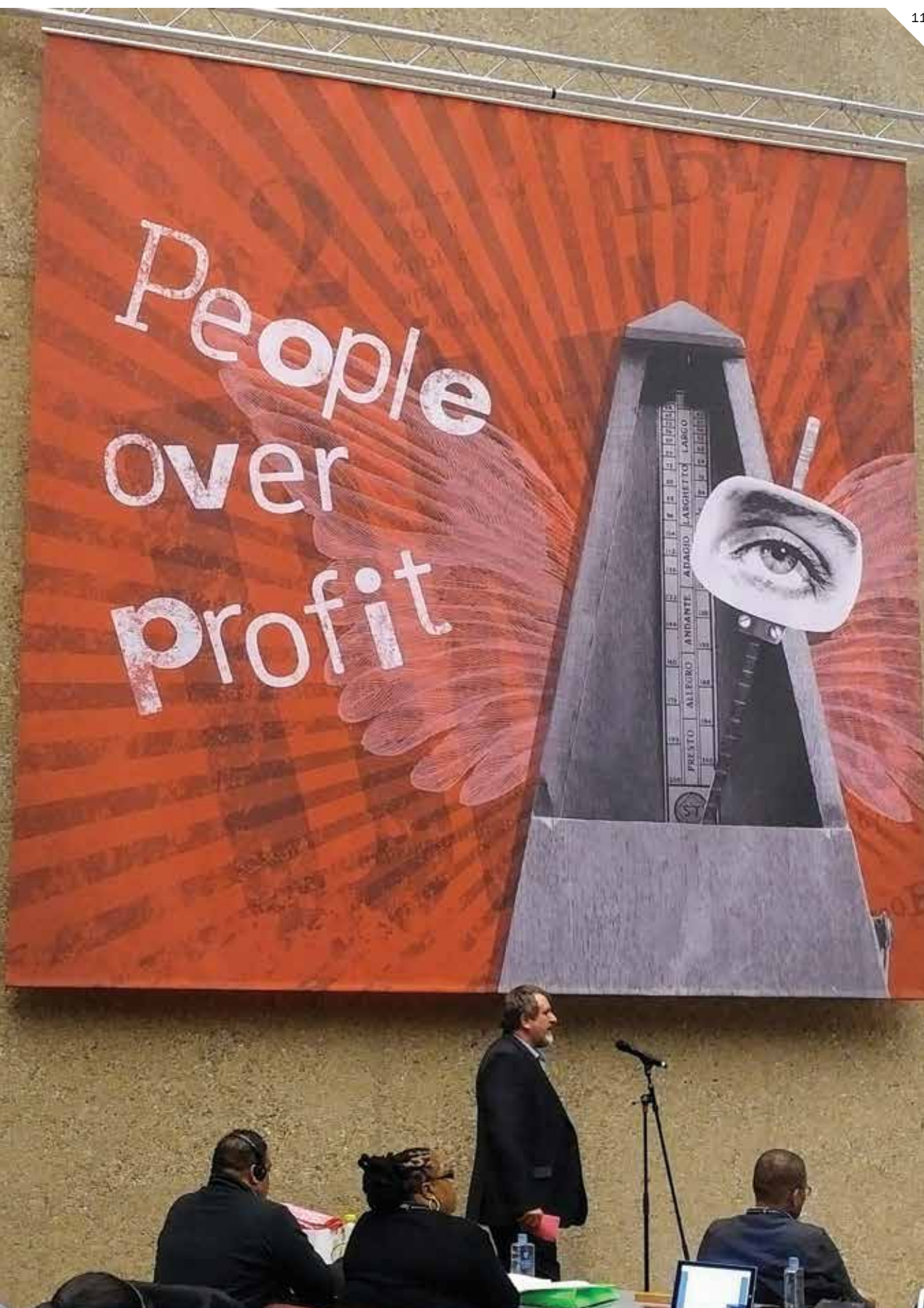
Recent elections in Honduras have led tens of thousands of people, including CUPE's partner organization Honduran Women's Collective (CODEMUH), to the streets in protest. They are demanding the immediate resignation of Juan Orlando Hernández

following elections that denied the opposition candidate Salvador Nasralla the presidency. The Organization of American States (OAS) concluded that the November 26, 2017 elections were fraudulent and required new elections.

Despite the obvious fraud, the will of the people, and the subsequent violence perpetrated by the state, the Canadian government recognized the Hernández government as legitimate. Eighty-five Canadian academics sent the Trudeau government a joint letter on January 22. It stated: "The fraudulent and repressive re-election of Juan Orlando Hernández must not be legitimized by Canada's presence at his inauguration. Nor should Canada continue to provide any form of assistance to his discredited regime."

Canadian corporations have much to gain from right-wing governments who undemocratically lead the country, including the expansion of corporate and investor rights in the areas of mining, garment sweatshop industry, hydro-electric dams and tourism.

CODEMUH is clear that they are in a dangerous situation, and that the country is in the worst condition in its history. They continue to organize in their workplaces and in the streets.





# GLOBAL JUSTICE FUND PROJECTS - 2017-2018

## CANADA

Letter to Prime Minister Trudeau asking for his intervention in Dr. Hassan Diab's case, who was extradited from Canada to France, and had been incarcerated since November 14, 2014. Diab was released in January 2018

Letter to The Honourable John McKay, M.P., Chair of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security about not inviting a representative from the International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group (ICLMG) to testify before the committee during hearings on Bill C-59

Letter to Prime Minister Trudeau asking the Government of Canada to take action regarding the severe deterioration of the human rights situation in the Philippines

Letter to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada in support of migrant justice organizations' Caregiver Pilot Program Consultation submission

Project: Strengthening solidarity with and enhancing the capacity of migrant workers in Canada (KAİROS)

## BANGLADESH

Project: Support for the Bangladesh Center for Workers' Solidarity – a joint project with CUPE, Steelworkers Humanity Fund Inc., PSAC Social Justice Fund; and the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation

## BRAZIL

Support letter to His Excellency Denis Fontes de Souza Pinto, Ambassador-designate of the Federative Republic of Brazil regarding the General Strike in Brazil on April 28, 2017

## BURMA/MYANMAR

Emergency funding to Oxfam Canada to support the Rohingya people in crisis at the border

## CENTRAL AMERICA

Project: Empowering women maquila workers' organizations - strengthening action strategies (CODEMUH)

## COLOMBIA

Letter to Juan Manuel Santos, President of the Republic of Colombia, on protecting the human rights of people of Buenaventura, who had been on a peaceful strike since May 16, 2017

Letter to Dr. Diego Fernando Mora Arango, Director, Unidad Nacional de Protección (UNP), requesting the UNP continue protection measures for Margarita López, President of SINTRACUAVALLE

Letter to the Comité de Evaluación de riesgo y Revaluación de Medidas expressing our concern for the safety of Margarita López, President of SINTRACUAVALLE

Letter to The Honourable Chrystia Freeland, Minister of Foreign Affairs, regarding Colombia's potential

membership to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

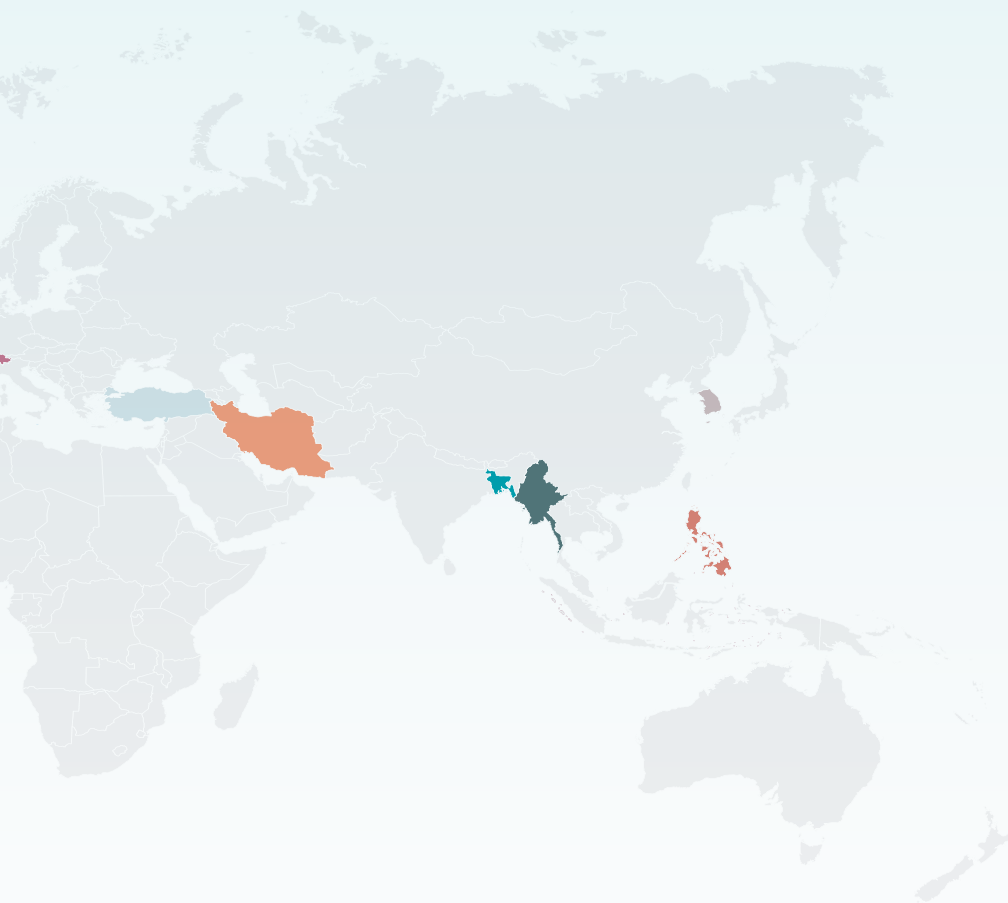
Project: Global defense of human rights to build policies for a transformative and participatory peace in Southwestern Colombia (NOMADESC)

Frontlines Delegation to Colombia - joint worker-to-worker solidarity initiative of Colombian trade unions and social movement organizations and four national public sector unions in Canada - the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW), the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC), and the National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE)

## CUBA

Project: Strengthening solidarity between the Cuban Public Sector Union and CUPE (SNTAP)





#### **GUATEMALA**

Project: Free the rivers – defending water as a human right in Guatemala (CCDA)

#### **HAITI**

Trade Union Delegation to Haiti – hosted by Confédération des travailleurs et travailleuses des secteurs public et privé (CTSP), with the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW)

#### **HONDURAS**

Project: Women strengthening their political capacity (CODEMUH)

#### **IRAN**

Letter to His Excellency, Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic Ayatollah Sayed Ali Khamenei and His Excellency, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Hassan Rouhani, regarding Reza Shahabi, a board member of the

Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company, ongoing detention  
Letter to His Excellency, Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic Ayatollah Sayed Ali Khamenei and His Excellency, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Hassan Rouhani, to end Reza Shahabi's persecution, and call for his immediate and unconditional release

Letter to His Excellency, Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic Ayatollah Sayed Ali Khamenei and His Excellency, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Hassan Rouhani, regarding the ongoing persecution and repression of labour activists in Iran

Project: Solidarity in defense of union members and leaders of the Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company Workers' Union

#### **NICARAGUA**

Project: Taking action to defend women maquila workers' labour and gender rights (MEC)

#### **PHILIPPINES**

Letter of concern to President Rodrigo R. Duterte regarding continuous attacks against students, teachers and human rights activists of the Lumad indigenous communities in Mindanao

Project: Partnership support for the Alliance of Concerned Teachers to build grassroots unionism in the education sector (ACT)

Project: Campaign for a national minimum wage and an end to contract labour of workers in the Philippines (COURAGE)

#### **PUERTO RICO**

Hurricane Maria relief funding to the Pediatric Hospital Foundation of Puerto Rico

#### **SWITZERLAND**

Public Services International (PSI) 30<sup>th</sup> World Congress

#### **TURKEY**

Letter to Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, President of the Republic of Turkey, asking to reinstate dismissed and suspended public sector workers

#### **SOUTH KOREA**

Letter to Moon Jae-in, President of South Korea, demanding the immediate release of KCTU President, Han Sang-gyun, and the withdrawal of the charges against the former General Secretary of KCTU, Lee Young-joo

#### **UNITED STATES**

Delegation to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women

#### **VENEZUELA**

Open letter in support of mediation, not sanctions in Venezuela

# THE ROAD AHEAD



If the violence of war and economic inequality continue to increase, people will continue to push back. If people's economic and social conditions continue to decline, we can only expect resistance movements to grow and become stronger. We are already seeing evidence of this

in the streets and in workplaces around the globe, from France to Gaza, and, from the US to Brazil.

We are living in uncertain times. Yet, in this uncertainty, there remains hope. Workers, activists and their families are finding creative and courageous ways to continue to fight for the society we want to live in.

Public services, the redistribution of wealth, democracy, justice and peace, are fair and righteous demands that we must work together to realize.

Through the Global Justice Fund and our relationships with workers around the world, we support and engage with strong trade unions and social movement organizations who are courageously organizing the most oppressed and marginalized among us. The consequences of economic policy rooted in unfettered capitalism affects us all. Our struggle as workers is a shared struggle for justice and dignity around the world.

Through project funding, CUPE members have opportunities to build relationships with workers all over the world. We want to connect with movements that demand decent jobs, living wages, and safe workplaces. We want to work alongside those movements that fight for access to public services and land rights. We engage with movements that oppose violence and war.

If your local is interested in supporting the CUPE National Global Justice Fund and our international solidarity initiatives, please visit [cupe.ca/globaljustice](http://cupe.ca/globaljustice), or contact our International Solidarity officer, Kelti Cameron at [kcameron@cupe.ca](mailto:kcameron@cupe.ca).







# OUR DONORS

▲  
FRONTLINES DELEGATION TO  
COLOMBIA 2018

## Global Fund Donors

March 2017 – April 2018

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