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LABOUR'S PLATFORM FOR THE AMERICAS

Decent work for sustainable
development in the Americas



Labour's Platform for the Americas





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Decent Work for Sustainable Development



Labour's Platform for the Americas was developed by the union movement of the region with representatives from the Inter-American Regional Workers' Organization (ORIT), the Andean Labour Consultative Council (CCLA), the Caribbean Congress of Labour (CCL), the Central America and Caribbean Union Coordination (CCSCAC), the Southern Cone Union Coordination (CCSCS) and the national labour centrals of Canada, the United States and Mexico.

It represents the perspectives of the peoples of the Americas and civil society organizations submitted to governments and international institutions of this hemisphere. This document is the result of a democratic process of reflection, debate and consultation bringing together regional labour perspectives, researchers and representatives of other social sectors. This Platform is an expression of the economic, social and cultural diversity of our hemisphere. Its goal is to contribute to a proposal for alternative development for the Americas based on "Decent Work for Sustainable Development".



Labour's Platform for the Americas



We, the working women and men of the Americas and the Caribbean, united as brothers and sisters in the Inter-American Regional Workers' Organization (ORIT), the Andean Labour Consultative Council (CCLA), the Caribbean Congress of Labour (CCL), the Central America and Caribbean Union Coordination (CCSCAC), the Southern Cone Union Coordination (CCSCS) and the national labour centrals of Canada, the United States and Mexico, are speaking with one voice on behalf of ourselves and our sons and daughters, to demand an urgent change of course.

We declare:

Globalization has exacted a very high toll from our peoples, not only those living in marginalized regions, but also in countries where globalization is perceived to have been a success. Since the free-market model was introduced in the Americas, every indicator of social well-being and working conditions has deteriorated significantly: employment, job stability, the quality of life, social mobility rates and levels of equality. The predatory attitude of capital toward our hemisphere's abundant and unprotected natural resources and toward stewardship of the environment, the insistent cheapening of the cost of labour and its increasing precariousness, growing inequalities regarding gender, class, race and ethnic origin all considered incentives to attract investment place in serious jeopardy the survival of important regions of the Americas. The scarcity of decent jobs has frayed the social safety net, reducing labour rights to mere declarations, annulling the potential of social dialogue between government, business and labour, and undermining companies' commitment to their social responsibility.



Our experience with the Washington Consensus and the neo-liberal economic policies stemming from it has shown the fundamentalist notion of “free trade” to be bankrupt.

We, the millions of working women and men forced into unemployment, pushed into poverty, battered by precarious working conditions and labour flexibility, obliged to leave our farms and our homes, urge the governments of the Americas to abandon the policies inspired by free-market fundamentalism. The hemisphere is in urgent need of an approach to sustainable development which places decent jobs and social justice at its heart, and the creation of mechanisms for the state to ensure no citizen is left behind. We need new policies designed from a gender perspective, which seek primarily to strengthen democracy, broaden opportunities for citizens to participate in decision-making at national and regional levels, reduce inequality, create decent work with dignified working conditions and full employment for all men and women in the Americas¹.

Ongoing processes of sub-regional integration must be strengthened as an alternative to neo-liberal free trade agreements which have only deepened the gulf between rich and poor, both between countries and within them. We know that there are different approaches to regional integration, and therefore we understand that they can bring positive benefits, as long as they do not disguise efforts by certain countries to dominate others, as has occurred with some neo-liberal free trade and investment agreements.



For these reasons, we propose this Labour Platform for the Americas as a point of departure for a new way forward for all of our peoples and our nations, with potential relevance for men and women across the world.

¹ An International Labour Organization's (ILO) definition:

“Decent work means productive work in which rights are protected, which generates an adequate income, with adequate social protection. It also means sufficient work, in the sense that all should have full access to income-earning opportunities. It marks the high road to economic and social development, a road in which employment, income and social protection can be achieved without compromising workers' rights and social standards.”

Source: “Report of the Director-General: Decent Work”, International Labour Office, Geneva, June 1999. www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/relm/ilc/ilc87/rep-i.htm

1. A New Democratic Consensus with Popular Sovereignty and a Gender Perspective

Without fully embracing democracy, a gender perspective and human rights, there will be no new way forward for the Americas.



The peoples and nations of the Americas urgently seek a new consensus based on the following objectives:

- ➔ Strengthening democracy and achieving full respect for human rights;
- ➔ Broadening the channels for citizen participation in national and international decision-making;
- ➔ Achieving social justice;
- ➔ Integrating a gender perspective into all policies;
- ➔ Eliminating all forms of discrimination on the basis of class, race, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation;
- ➔ Establishing full employment as the basis for sustainable development;
- ➔ Ensuring no man, woman or child is excluded from our societies; and
- ➔ Rebuilding the capacity of governments to take pro-active measures.

We support and defend the self-determination of peoples and states, convinced that a multilateral hemispheric system in the Americas based on institutions open to real participation by the citizenry will constitute a sound basis for achieving freedom and social justice.



Building a democratic society requires the permanent integration of gender perspectives into all public policies, because all aspects of production, reproduction and caring are relevant to addressing the inequalities between men and women.

All institutions and programs, all policies, laws, agreements and decisions, be they national, sub-regional or regional, must contain mechanisms which allow for bringing a gender perspective to bear and which guarantee women's active participation and respect their rights as workers. In addition, public policy must prevent violence against women, guarantee sexual and reproductive rights and, take into account women's unpaid labour in the home.



Adopting a gender perspective implies not only delivering programs for women, but creating programs that transform the system of gender relations, encouraging men and women to make positive changes that place women and men in a position of equality. Women's condition will only be effectively transformed if such changes are encouraged through innovative social policies which modify not only economic structures but also the structures of power and authority so that women's rightful role as active agents of social change is fully acknowledged.

Decision-making in the Inter-American² system must be improved, so that it becomes more effective and representative of the real needs and desires of our peoples, and therefore capable of implementing the proposals we put forth in Labour's Platform for the Americas.

The following are the measures which we consider necessary:



- a. Create decision-making procedures for tripartite and multipartite labour consultations under the auspices of the ILO.
- b. Link the Inter-American system to sub regional integration processes while respecting their autonomy.

² The Inter-American system refers to all of the intergovernmental institutions in the hemisphere {Organization of American States (OAS), the Labour Ministers' Conference (IACML), the Inter-American Human Rights Court and Commission, etc.}

- c. Establish affirmative action measures which guarantee that at least one third of all representative and consultative posts will be filled by women.
- d. Strengthen the Inter-American Conference of Labour Ministers.
- e. Submit fundamental international decisions to citizen ratification and organize a system for democratic citizen appeal of the same.
- f. Incorporate a gender perspective into the design of policies and budgets
- g. Guarantee financing for the Inter-American Human Rights Commission and Court so that they can implement and follow up on their decisions and sentences.
- h. Endorse the Social Charter of the Americas³, linking it to the current hemispheric system for human, civil and political, economic, social and cultural rights and the system's protective mechanisms and institutions.



2. Economic Objectives which Pursue Sustainable Development and Focus on Decent Jobs and Full Employment

In order to address the real problems faced by the peoples of the Americas, we need a new approach to the economy, one that encourages sustainable development and places decent jobs and full employment at its heart, acknowledging the active role of the state. The labour movement of the Americas calls on governments to abandon policies which seek only to regulate the demand for labour, and instead adopt policies intended to generate decent productive jobs.

Our workers' organizations in the Americas maintain that relevant policies oriented toward the goal of full employment should meet the following conditions:

³ Proposed by the Government of Venezuela, the Social Charter of the Americas consists of 129 articles that address social and human rights related to health, work, education, basic rights, cultural identity, environmental protection and indigenous peoples. It was submitted for debate to the OAS in August, 2005

Foreign Debt: Indebtedness must not undermine the fight against poverty or restrict the path to sustainable development. For the majority of our countries, the foreign debt constitutes one of the primary obstacles to eradicating poverty and generating sustainable development. Our union organizations have spoken out repeatedly on the illegitimate nature of much of that debt (“odious debt”) and on the barriers which prevent our peoples from learning where the money came from and where it ended up. Creditors share responsibility for that debt and it should not be repaid. Debts owed by the lesser developed countries of the Americas to the most developed ones should be cancelled. Governments must instead give priority to the fight against poverty and to the development of countries and regions.

The member states of the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), as shareholders, have the obligation to reform that institution so that approval by national legislatures of recipient countries is required before loan projects can be considered by the IADB Board of Directors. National legislatures ought as well to have the authority to convene hearings on proposed IADB projects and policies, including the power to subpoena Bank officials. The IADB must also adopt a safeguard policy in accordance with labour standards of the International Labour Organization (ILO), applicable to all projects and policies, including follow-up, and applicable as well to Bank personnel. The active participation of national unions in all phases of loan negotiation and project financing is essential to monitor the social and labour impact of programs implemented and to ensure transparency and participation in the entire process.



➔ **Policy Coherence** : Achieving full employment will require that all relevant policies be oriented toward the goal of creating decent jobs. This includes macro-economic policies as well as



policies on investment, technological innovation, infrastructure, rational use of natural resources and the environment, trade, production, migration, education, social responsibility for domestic and reproductive work, social services and social security. Governments should spurn social policies oriented exclusively toward adjusting the demand for labour, which consider

unemployment to be a temporary problem due to difficulties of “employability.”

➔ **Investment and Economic Priorities** : National economic policy ought to prioritize productive investment and universal public social services to address existing inequalities, rather than structural and monetary adjustment measures. Governments must insist that foreign investors respect labour rights, obey national laws and submit to the authority of national judicial systems. Governments must also seek the reinvestment of profits so as to guarantee genuine economic development, penalizing “social dumping” and capital flight.

➔ **Fiscal Policy and Progressive Taxation** : New fiscal policies and progressive taxation are urgently needed to achieve improved income distribution, to strengthen the industrial sector, to provide incentives for technological and scientific innovation and its application, and to reinforce small and micro enterprises and family farming. The pursuit of fiscal responsibility and monetary stability is useful only to the degree that it serves these social goals.

➔ **Complementary Production** : Where there exists strengths and advantages in production capacity in a particular area or sector that can contribute in a complementary way to integrated chains of production, these sectors should be encouraged to consolidate their advantages by concentrating in zones of development.

➔ **Promotion of Local Development** : The sustainable development of local regions should be pursued through projects that link economic actors emphasizing economies of solidarity which focus on human beings, fair distribution of wealth, democratic decision-making, and a commitment to the local reality in which they reside.



➔ **Infrastructure Integration** : Governments must make a hemispheric commitment to integrate the hemisphere's infrastructure in order to promote sustainable development, full employment and enhanced communication among peoples, and should do so by completing existing infrastructure projects and undertaking new ones.

➔ **Sectoral Policies** : Sectoral policies constitute an essential component of a regional plan for sustainable development and complementary production. Priority objectives should include achieving each sector's systemic competitiveness at the national, sub-regional and hemispheric levels, drawing up inter-sectoral plans for industry, trade, infrastructure and finance, and creating special programs to strengthen micro-enterprises and small and medium-sized businesses.

➔ **Family Farming** : In ways appropriate to each national circumstance, governments must support the development of family farming via policies to guarantee domestic food supply and food sovereignty. Governments must support an approach to agriculture which protects the environment, guarantees food to all the hemisphere's people and respects the relationship between communities and their natural environments.

➔ **Income Distribution** : Due to the severe inequalities that characterize societies in the Americas, a sustained strategy for redistributing income toward labour should be adopted immediately. It should be based on full employment, universal unemployment insurance coverage, living wage policies, tax reform, the provision of public services and reduction of the workweek.

➔ **Hemispheric Funds** : Structural Funds to assist less favoured regions and to raise the competitiveness of countries ought to be created, based on complementary production and built around the goals of promoting decent employment and achieving economic reform. Developed countries have an obligation to help eradicate the asymmetries between our nations. Sub-regional blocs ought to create Investment Funds for production projects and social infrastructure. Universal Social Funds also ought to be created in order to eradicate hunger and poverty, as should Training Funds to guarantee every working man and woman of the Americas access to the necessary skills to obtain a decent job and to update those skills as needed, and Public Health Funds to eradicate HIV/AIDS and other pandemic diseases. These Funds should be financed through progressive and sustainable hemispheric-wide taxation.

➔ **Strengthening Government Capacity** : Indebtedness and financial liberalization have restricted the capacity of government to stimulate our economies. In addition, speculation and capital flight have repeatedly disrupted our economies, impoverishing both citizens and government. Our governments need to regain control over the market and rebuild their capacity to generate revenue to meet social needs. To those ends, governments must take collective action to discourage tax evasion and punish evasion via tax havens. The Organization of American States (OAS) should take the lead in this area.

➔ **Privatizations** : Inter-American organizations should ask member states to review the privatizations they have undertaken. Governments should evaluate the economic and social impact of privatizations and their contribution to the formation of oligopolies and private monopolies, as well as uncover any corruption that may have occurred, and then take the corrective measures deemed necessary. Governments must instruct the IADB and other multilateral financial organisms to conduct a meticulous analysis of the social impact of the privatization projects in which they have been involved, and not to consider investments in productive infrastructure as spending when calculating current accounts.

➔ **Access to Knowledge** : In the Americas, access to scientific and technological knowledge must be guaranteed in all areas that affect living organisms, bio-diversity and the traditional knowledge of our peoples. Technology transfer to lesser developed countries must be facilitated. Wealthy countries ought to provide adequate compensation for socio-economic losses caused by the migration of highly trained professionals via the so-called 'brain-drain'.



➔ **Large Companies and Multinational Corporations** : Companies must fulfill their social responsibility and their commitment to social development by adhering strictly and obligatorily to the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, the United Nations Global Compact, the Tripartite ILO Declaration on Multinational Enterprises and the International Framework Agreements in force. They must take an active role in tripartite and multipartite stakeholder dialogues at national and international levels, organize their labour relations on the basis of national and international collective bargaining, and ensure that branch plants and subcontractors also fulfill their social responsibility.

➔ **Small and Micro-Enterprises** : These businesses form the nucleus of most labour-intensive employment. National governments and sub-regional institutions must take steps to support the sustainable development of small and micro-enterprises, reducing their tax burden and facilitating financing. With the same approach and according to particular national conditions, governments must meet the needs of family farming and promote its development.



- ➔ **Jobs for Women** : Specific programs for women must be created to improve their access to the labour market and to promote equality of opportunity and treatment, especially regarding wages, working conditions, labour rights, family responsibilities and public childcare policy.



- ➔ **Jobs for Youth** : Policies to support youth employment are needed to guarantee all rights for young women and men, with particular attention to ILO Convention 138 on Minimum Working Age and 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour. These policies must achieve the eradication of rotating minimum-wage jobs and precarious working conditions. New jobs should be created for young workers instead of youth displacing adult workers who also need employment. The new generation should be educated about their human, civil, social and labour rights. This will help them join the working world and will guarantee them opportunities to gain social and professional skills and community participation.



- ➔ **Elimination of Child Labour** : Government policies coordinated at the Inter-American level to eliminate all forms of child exploitation must be implemented. This must be undertaken through an integrated approach which guarantees boys and girls free public education from pre-school age while ensuring employment for adults in the family.



- ➔ **Education and Professional Training** : Governments must guarantee access to free, quality public education and ensure continuation through graduation, so that citizens can fully exercise their rights. Programs which provide general education, childcare from birth and professional training must be broadened to integrate a gender perspective, and must provide life-long support so workers can acquire the necessary skills to join and remain in the workforce.



3. *Promoting and Fulfilling Social and Labour Rights*

➔ **Formal Employment** : There is an urgent need to substantially increase the number of decent jobs. To that end, governments must enact an aggressive enforcement policy to ensure compliance with and full respect for national labour legislation as well as improvements in said laws.



➔ **Labour Inspectors** : Governments must strengthen all inspection and enforcement mechanisms so that employers comply effectively with labour laws. In the short term, the Inter-American system must require all member states to adopt the basic conventions of the ILO and to monitor companies' compliance.

➔ **Labour Tribunals** : In many countries, labour courts are slow to resolve disputes and thus violate the individual and collective rights of working men and women. Labour tribunals become politicized and often unfairly take the side of employers. The governments of the Americas must ensure that the courts dealing with labour disputes respect and apply the principle that justice delayed is justice denied, and fulfill their obligation to defend the rights of working men and women.

➔ **Universal Access and Pay-As-You-Go Social Safety Nets :**

Providing social services is a critical responsibility of government because social security is a human right. There is an extremely serious predicament in the Americas because of the exclusion of tens of millions of workers from the health and social security systems and related and growing financial troubles those systems are experiencing. It is urgent to strengthen these systems by restoring the principle of universal access to benefits, especially for children and the elderly, by making progress toward the indivisibility of services and by achieving sustainable financing with social justice, while at the same time doing away with approaches based on private profit.



➔ **Unionization and Collective Bargaining** : To

achieve a real improvement in the living conditions of the working men and women of the Americas, as well as a deepening of democracy, labour rights must be promoted and mechanisms for collective bargaining established at all levels. The organizations of working women and men must be protagonists in the design and implementation of such mechanisms.



➔ **Balancing Work and Family** : The countries of the



Americas must undertake a serious effort to balance the needs of family and those of the workplace, so that work is compatible with family life and caring for children, the sick, the disabled and the elderly. To this end, governments and regional and sub-regional institutions must actively pay attention to this issue in three principal areas:

- a) Within companies, considering a reduced workweek without loss of pay, so that the right of working men and women to attend to their families' needs becomes part of companies' social responsibility.
- b) Within society, strengthening public systems, accessible to all men and women, which support caring for children, the sick, the disabled and the elderly.
- c) Within male-dominated cultures, bestowing social value on reproductive work and distributing it equitably between men and women.



➡ **Discrimination** : To guarantee equality of opportunity and treatment in the workplace, public anti-discrimination policies should be promoted and strictly enforced by new tripartite sub-regional boards, which should pay particular attention to discrimination by gender, race, sexual orientation, national origin and culture. The rights and labour of sex workers must be respected. Policies regarding equality of opportunity and treatment must be coordinated, must include affirmative action and should set indicators to allow for periodic accounting of progress or lack thereof. The governments in the Americas must take specific steps to protect and preserve cultures and indigenous rights.



Workers' Freedom of Movement : One of the principles of the labour movement of the Americas is the eventual elimination of

restrictions that impede the free movement of persons. In the Americas, tens of millions of working men and women and their families are obliged to migrate, pushed out by poverty and the enormous gulf between rich and poor. For this reason, we consider it a primary obligation of government to develop the necessary policies to guarantee our workers' freedom not to emigrate. For



those workers who have emigrated and their families, no matter their migratory status, the authorities must recognize the floor of rights guaranteed by the International Convention on the Protection of All Rights of Migrant Workers and their Families, as well as ILO Conventions 97 and 143 on Migrant Workers. Governments should also acknowledge the principle that no one should be sent back to where their rights have been violated. In addition, ways must be found in the Americas to link pension systems so that the upheaval caused by migration is not aggravated by the loss of benefits. Similarly, a system for validating professional credentials and degrees must be established so that human resources are not under-utilized and workers' professional and other skills obtained in their countries of origin are respected. The governments of the Americas must jointly undertake to eradicate abuses in the transfer of remittances by migrant workers. Similarly, governments must recognize the principle of non-refoulement contemplated in the International Convention on the Protection of All the Rights of Migrant Workers and their Families for the victims of terrorism, smuggling and trafficking, sexual and labour exploitation, workplace accidents and repression for union activity.



4. *A Guarantee That No One Will Be Excluded*

There are enormous challenges to overcome in the Americas if we are to adopt a new approach to economic, social and labour policy. The social security system must be reformed, given that it was designed to address only those with formal employment and thus excludes the majority of the population. It is practically impossible to imagine a sustainable system of social security without improving employment levels and increasing formal employment and family incomes. But it would also be ethically unsustainable and politically dangerous to democracy to await job creation via economic recovery before putting new social policies into effect. As long as the economy is not generating enough formal jobs, governments must guarantee social benefits to all working women and men, whether they are formally or informally employed or unemployed.

To fight poverty effectively, universal access to social services must be coordinated with job-creation, labour and income policies, so as not to split society into those who have jobs and those who receive assistance.

5. *Making Labour's Platform for the Americas a Reality*

To make Labour's Platform for the Americas a reality, year by year, regional and sub-regional follow-up mechanisms will be established, based on social dialogue and the active participation of civil society. These mechanisms must be based on short, medium and long-term goals for government policy, placing full employment and decent jobs at the heart of the hemisphere's sustainable development.

To help achieve this objective, the following regional and sub-regional indicators with national specifications designed from a gender perspective should be agreed on:

- Inequality
- Poverty
- Unemployment
- Informal Employment
- Gender Equality
- Child Labour
- Gender Development Index (UNDP)

Each year, forums created to monitor follow-up on Labour's Platform for the Americas should meet and report back to our peoples and nations on the status of efforts to achieve these proposed goals and on the measures necessary to implement them.





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