

CUPE BC 2022 CONVENTION INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY COMMITTEE REPORT

CUPE BC's International Solidarity Committee continues to focus on issues of global justice with a mix of new and seasoned committee members for this term.

The committee established an action plan in November 2021, which includes the following:

- To support CUPE BC as they lobby the Provincial Government to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- Maintain relationships with current partners and explore opportunities to expand partnerships with other international human rights organizations and Trade Unions.
- Work to connect undocumented people(s) and migrant workers in Canada with public services and resources delivered by CUPE members in BC.
- Promote International Solidarity Education amongst CUPE members.

The committee continues to:

- Support Palestinian Solidarity efforts, including supporting workers through our partnership with *WAC-MAAN*, the *Workers Advice Centre*, and the *Land Defense Coalition's Right to Water Campaign*.
- Engage with Iranian Solidarity Organization *Free Them Now*.
- Support the *Migrant Workers Centre*.
- Support ongoing participation in partnerships through *CoDevelopment Canada* (CoDev).
- Review the Colleen Jordan Fund commitments in conjunction with the CUPE BC Executive Board.

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The CUPE BC International Solidarity Committee is also focused on local issues that we, as front-line public sector workers, can address to create equity within our communities.

Our goal is to participate in creating equity within our movement, not only here in Canada, but all around the world. In this regard, we strive to provide CUPE BC with vital links to other like-minded organizations that also work to prevent unchecked capitalism from robbing workers of just and fair working conditions, living wages and, in many cases, basic human rights. The forces that align against us in this regard are globally organized and, if we are to be effective in reaching our goals, we must be as well. An injury to one is an injury to all, and, while it is true that workers face similar challenges throughout the world, in many places, advocating for workers to have access to the kinds of rights we enjoy in Canada can, and does, result in dire threats and, in many circumstances, tragic outcomes.

It is with these goals in mind that the Committee supports the following:

Free Them Now

Free Them Now is an Iranian Solidarity organization working to defend the rights of workers and social justice activists. The organization has a global network of activists who are working to raise awareness and pressure governments to condemn the actions of the Iranian regime against its own people.

Pivot Legal Society

Pivot Legal Society and the Coalition on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women have made submissions on the design of the national inquiry. Among many other recommendations, Pivot and the Coalition have urged the government to ensure that:

- Indigenous women lead the inquiry.
- Impacted groups are consulted with and transparency is maintained.
- The social, economic, and political marginalization of Indigenous women is addressed.

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- Time and supports needed for people to share their stories are provided.

Pivot's Recommendations:

- Create safe spaces for those who sell or trade sex to participate, including by allowing for anonymity and ensuring confidentiality if participants desire.
- Provide appropriate monetary and emotional support for participants.
- Work with and provide funding to trusted community organizations, including sex worker led and sex worker serving groups, to facilitate local consultations.

Migrant Workers Centre

The committee is pleased to maintain a partnership with the Migrant Workers Centre (MWC), which provides important services to promote and advance access to justice for migrant workers.

Formerly known as the West Coast Domestic Workers' Association (WCDWA), the MWC was formed in 1986 by Kyong-ae Kim and Janet Patterson, two law students at the University of British Columbia. While researching problems facing domestic workers, Kyong-ae and Janet realized there was a need for legal resources geared towards foreign workers employed as caregivers. In 1987, the West Coast Domestic Workers' Association officially incorporated as a non-profit society. Thirty years later, the organization changed its name to Migrant Workers Centre to reflect its expanded role to promote and advance justice for caregivers and other at-risk migrant workers.

MWC facilitates access to justice for migrant workers through the provision of legal information, advice, and representation. The Centre provides public legal education and training to migrant workers and service providers across BC in the areas of employment law and immigration law. Over the years, MWC has assisted thousands of clients and has given hundreds of workshops.

CoDevelopment Canada

CUPE BC continues to partner with CoDev Canada to support worker-to-worker projects in Colombia, Cuba, Nicaragua, and Honduras. CUPE BC and our Latin American partners share a commitment to creating a fairer society that values people over profits, worker rights over corporate rights, and human rights for all. Our partners' achievements over the past year reflect those shared values. Please refer to the CoDev Reports on our projects.

Respectfully submitted:

Nicole Edmondson, Chair
Andrew Ledger, Co-Chair
Frank Lee, Co-Chair
Betsey Cadamia
Amandeep Cheema
Warren Leeder
Jas Parmar
Drew Parris
Irma Lisset Peckham
Harmony Raine
Rocco Trigueros Chavez
Tammi Yazdanyar
Deanna Fasciani, CoDev Canada Executive Director
Bryan Bickley, Staff Advisor
Chika Buston, Administrative Assistant

March 2022





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Report to CUPE BC International Solidarity Committee, 2021-2022

The Honduran Women's Collective (CODEMUH)

EST. 1989

CUPE BC Partner since 2015

CUPE supports CODEMUH's health and safety work with the mainly female workers of the *maquilas*, garment factories in the assembly for export zones in Honduras. This work includes the training of shop floor health and safety advocates and public campaigns to improve working conditions and urge the government to enforce the labour code. CODEMUH accompanies workers in cases of wrongful dismissal, for reasonable accommodation, or to obtain required medical treatments.



Partner Activities:

2021. Honduras.

CODEMUH worker and Reynita - a worker who was wrongfully dismissed - protest against Pride Manufacturing.

In 2021-22, CODEMUH focused their work on supporting maquila workers and continued to inspire and demonstrate the success of their multi-level approach to women's human and labour rights organizing and advocacy.

On the community level, CODEMUH trained over 202 workers on workplace health and safety, shop floor advocacy, community and labour organizing, and more. Many of the women who attended CODEMUH's workshops and training sessions have assumed positions as community leaders and are furthering the workplace and community organizing by sharing knowledge on workers' rights and on processes and procedures to address workplace injuries and occupational diseases.

On the organizational level, CODEMUH supported over 350 maquila workers in obtaining the required documentation to support reports of workplace injuries and provided legal counsel to individuals and groups of workers who requested workplace accommodations and reassignments due to workplace injuries or who were wrongfully terminated due to occupational illness or disease.



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2021. Tegucigalpa, Honduras.
CODEMUH protest in front of Honduras' Courthouse.

On the structural level, CODEMUH reported and documented cases of labour law infringements against maquila workers and pressured all levels of government to prioritize maquila worker health and safety through policy and the enforcement of legal procedures to uphold maquila workers' rights.

In order to raise public awareness around maquila worker health and safety and enlist public support for their work, CODEMUH conducted media campaigns as tools to educate and advocate for maquila workers' rights and push for accountability on the part of the Honduran Government

and *maquila* owners, such as the Canadian apparel brand, Gildan Activewear, Pride Manufacturing, and Dickies Honduras.

CODEMUH is hopeful that the newly elected progressive Government of Xiomara Castro will support advances to women's human and labour rights in Honduras and step towards increased accountability on the part of *maquila* owners and operators.

Click [here](#) to see a greeting to CUPE BC members from Maria Luisa Regalado, the Director of CODEMUH, for CUPE BC's 2022 convention



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Report to CUPE BC International Solidarity Committee, 2021-2022

Maria Elena Cuadra Movement of Employed and Unemployed Women (MEC) – Nicaragua

EST. 1993

CUPE BC Partner since 1994

CUPE BC supports MEC's work with the mainly female workforce in *maquilas* of Nicaragua, garment factories that assemble clothing for export to North America and Europe. This work includes the training of shop floor advocates, legal accompaniment for workers who file complaints with the labour tribunals, and a free legal clinic for women in marginalized communities. MEC is an explicitly feminist organization that carries out its labour and community organizing within the context of feminist struggle. MEC's founder and Executive Director is Sandra Ramos.



Photo of the last workshop given by MEC before it's forced closure. February 2022

Partner Activities:

The past two years have been among the most challenging years for MEC. While engaging in community organizing and advocacy for maquila women workers' labour and human rights, MEC experienced intense political persecution, which took the form of police surveillance and bureaucratic stonewalling, among other tactics of obstruction and intimidation. This sustained political attack culminated in MEC's forced closure by the Ortega Government on February 11, 2022.

For over four years, the Government of Nicaragua refused to accept MEC's documents and annual tax filings, which are required in order to maintain an organization legal standing. During this time of limited communication and instruction from government officials, MEC witnessed a number of domestic and international social justice and human rights organizations, especially women's rights groups, face dissolution or expulsion from the country due to State claims of irregular documentation and illegal operations. Since 2018, the current regime has shuttered 99 NGOs, 56 of which were domestic civil society organizations.



With the imminent threat of closure looming over the MEC team, staff approached their work with urgency and resolve. They worked through threats to the organization, to their livelihood, and to their personal freedom, knowing that at any moment they might be arrested for allegedly operating illegally with international funds. These fears have adversely impacted the mental health of MEC's personnel.



With the support of CUPE BC, and in spite of the relentless political repression, MEC successfully carried out the following activities:

- Obtained the necessary legal support in the attempt to oblige the Ortega Government to accept MEC's annual filing of organizational documentation;
- Hired mental health supports and hosted mental health retreats for *maquila* workers;
- Conducted strategic and contingency planning to ensure the continuation of MEC's work in the workplace and in communities in the event that MEC were to lose legal status;
- Organized an underground conference of 500 women leaders to discuss the future of the Women's Movement in not only Nicaragua but throughout Central America.

On February 11, 2022, MEC received a State document informing them that their legal status was to be revoked. On February 15, 2022, the Legislative Assembly voted to repeal MEC's legal status. MEC was subsequently granted two weeks to cease operations: settle their accounts and pay out their workers and suppliers, prepare their tax filings, and other administrative tasks.

Despite this pressure, MEC's team used the time between February 11th and end of the month to run multiple training sessions with dozens of women *maquila* workers; conduct community outreach and organizing; train women leaders in the community who will continue to train and build leadership among fellow *maquila* workers in their own homes; and explore ways in which to communicate and stay connected with the target communities.

Throughout the year, MEC has been proud and grateful to count on the solidarity of CUPE BC. MEC's leadership, workers, and members are unwavering in their commitment to continue their critical work, with or without the permission of the Ortega regime. The struggle continues.





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Report to CUPE BC International Solidarity Committee, 2021-2022
Association for Research and Social Action (NOMADESC) - Colombia

EST. 1999

CUPE BC Partner since 2003

NOMADESC is a Colombian human rights organization that works with Indigenous, Afro-Colombian, peasant communities, and labour organizations to defend and advance human rights in the southwest region of Colombia. CUPE BC supports NOMADESC's work to train rights defenders; assist community organizations to develop comprehensive plans to achieve peace in the conflict-ridden region; and pursue legal cases related to the killings and forced disappearances of rights defenders. Berenice Celeita is Founder and President of NOMADESC.



Public mobilization during the 2021 National Strike in Colombia.

Partner Activities:

Spring 2021 witnessed the start of the National Strike, a mass mobilization of popular groups organized in opposition to regressive tax reforms, privatization of health care, and corruption and violence perpetrated by the Colombian State. Cali, a city located in southwest Colombia, has been a centre of significant youth-led organizing and brutal police and military repression. Dozens of youth have been assassinated. Between January 2021 and December 2021, alone, 169 social leaders were assassinated, 92 massacres were conducted, and 48 peace signatories were killed.

Due to the everchanging political and social terrain prompted by the National Strike and the State's response, NOMADESC's human rights defense work and community accompaniment, advocacy, and activism vastly expanded and underwent organizational prioritization. Until April 2022, NOMADESC conducted scheduled project activities and held multiple workshops. However, by May 2021, the onslaught by State forces against Cali-based organizers and mobilized community members impelled NOMADESC to pivot to address this human rights emergency. NOMADESC established four response teams:

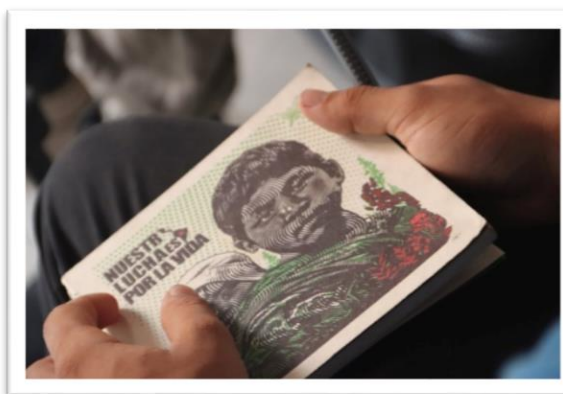


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1. Prevention and protection accompaniment team in the field;
2. Socio-legal assistance team;
3. Documentation team;
4. Humanitarian accompaniment team

During the National Strike in 2021, NOMADESC provided accompaniment to more than 100 victims of arbitrary detention and succeeded in securing their release from custody. NOMADESC is currently handling 22 serious cases of human rights violations and is provided humanitarian and psychosocial care in 40 additional cases.

As a result of its central role in defending the rights of victims and their families to truth, justice, comprehensive reparation, and guarantees of non-repetition, NOMADESC's personnel became the target of police surveillance and intimidation. NOMADESC consequently evaluated the security conditions for both their staff and participants in their programs. High-risk conditions have required higher levels of self-protection, institutional protection, and international watch and advocacy.



"Our struggle is for life", reads the flyer above, distributed during the 2021 National Strike in Colombia



Students of the Intercultural University of the Peoples, Southwest Colombia, 2021

With CUPE BC's support, and in spite of the intensified repression in 2021 onwards, NOMADESC succeeded in continuing its work with the Intercultural University of the Peoples, where 46 students graduated and a new intake of students commenced their studies in 2021. This popular education initiative underscores the importance of the collective construction of training processes for community leaders to advance social, cultural, environmental, and economic rights in Colombia and beyond.

Click [here](#) to see a greeting to CUPE BC members from Berenice Celeita, the Founder and President of NOMADESC, for CUPE BC's 2022 convention.



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Report to CUPE BC International Solidarity Committee, 2021-2022 National Union of Public Administration Workers (SNTAP) – Cuba

EST. 1961

CUPE BC Partner since 1995

SNTAP brings together over 55,000 state workers and 6,000 private sector workers, of whom over 41,000 are women.

CUPE BC's four-year project with SNTAP's Havana Division builds on the 27-year history of international solidarity and exchange between CUPE BC and SNTAP.



Municipal workers, SNTAP members, in Havana, Cuba

The Project comprises three chief components:

1. Shipment of urgently needed supplies which SNTAP requires to represent and service its members and which are not readily available due to the U.S.-imposed trade embargo;
2. Workplace health and safety training for shop stewards from among Havana's municipal workers;
3. Facilitation of learning exchanges between CUPE BC and SNTAP to promote the exchange of tools for carrying out transformative work in the workplace and community.

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly delayed the project over the course of 2020 and 2021. This challenge is further compounded by the effects of the U.S.-imposed embargo, including the 264 restrictive measures imposed by the Trump administration immediately before and during the pandemic. These restrictions have been upheld by the current Biden administration.

In regards to the provision of supplies, the global supply chain crisis impeded the ability to source shipping containers and secure shipping carrier and route. Shipping costs for the project, moreover, have increased threefold. Furthermore, the COVID-19 virus prompted SNTAP members to focus immediately



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on COVID-19 transmission prevention and mitigation in their workplaces and communities, and regular occupational health and safety training was postponed. Finally, the pandemic has prevented delegations of SNTAP members and CUPE members from travelling to Canada and Cuba, respectively.

Despite these initial challenges, the project proceeding with urgency and care. CoDev is sourcing and procuring the requested electronic, automotive, medical, and office supplies which enable SNTAP to more effectively communicate with and support its members. The shipment of these critical supplies to Cuba is expected to occur spring/summer 2022. This year will also include planning for SNTAP shop steward training and future learning exchanges.

February 26, 2022, CUPE BC's President, Karen Ranalletta, and SNTAP's Secretary General, Yaisel Osvaldo Pieter Terry, participated in an event organized by CoDev entitled, *Spotlight on Cuba: Solidarity amidst Blockade and Pandemic*, in which SNTAP and fellow Cuban unions shared their experiences of living and working under the blockade, their successful efforts at combatting COVID-19, and the critical role of solidarity between Canadian and Cuban public sector unions. You can watch the event [here](#).



Photo: Heriberto González Brito. SNTAP celebrated its 60 years anniversary in November 2021.

- Click [here](#) to see a greeting to CUPE BC members from Yaisel Pieter Terry, the Secretary General of SNTAP, for CUPE BC's 2022 convention
- Click [here](#) to watch CoDev's *Spotlight on Cuba* event.
- Click [here](#) to see the SNTAP's formal invitation to May Day celebrations in Cuba.