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Amigos de
la Tierra
EL SALVADOR

**Los pueblos seguimos en lucha contra el
libre comercio y las transnacionales**

Internationalist Solidarity and the Struggle Against Corporate Power

Reflections on the COVID-19 pandemic and corporate
violations of peoples' rights and their human rights



**Amigos de
la Tierra**
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Contents

1. Introduction	4
1.1 Understanding peoples' rights through the environmental justice lens	5
1.2 Why look at peoples' rights and their human rights through an environmental lens?	6
1.3 ATALC's vision for responding to the violations of peoples' rights and their human rights	8
2. Neoliberalism's attacks and threats to democracy and to peoples' rights and their human rights during the COVID-19 pandemic	9
2.1 State of Emergency and COVID-19	9
2.2 Criminalisation as a mechanism for systematic violations and abuse	12
2.3 TNCs, criminal practises, and the architecture of impunity	14
2.4 Coups d'états, militarisation and territorial dispossession	15
3. Violations of peoples' rights and their human rights in the region	18
3.1 El Salvador	19
3.2 Brasil	24
3.3 Costa Rica	31
3.4 Haiti	35
4. Reponses from peoples and their social movements	40
4.1 Reaffirming collective popular political subjects	40
4.2 The Continental Platform for Democracy and Against Neoliberalism as a political subject presenting a peoples' response	42
5. Internationalist Solidarity to defend peoples' sovereignty	44
5.1 Reflections on FoEI's Internationalist Solidarity System and the participation of ATALC and allied movements and organisations	45
5.1.1 The permanent process of political formation is indispensable	46
5.1.2 Documentation and analysis based on environmental justice programmatic categories	46
5.1.3 Prevention as a response	47
5.1.4 Accompaniment and follow-up during and after situations of risk and vulnerability	48

1

Introduction

By: Danilo Urrea¹

This document explores the definition of peoples' rights and its reach in relation to defending human rights through an environmental justice lens.

Friends of the Earth Latin America and the Caribbean (ATALC) believes that environmental justice necessarily involves struggles for the dignity of life that integrate the recognition of rights in the environmental, social, economic, and gender dimensions. Achieving a holistic justice that includes these dimensions entails a political dispute with agents and actors that accumulate capital while systematically violating rights that were hard-won by peoples, their organisations, and social movements. Actions and processes that violate peoples' rights and their human rights include: land-grabbing; territorial destruction; privatisation, commodification, and financialization of water – among other environmental injustices; as well as stigmatisation, persecution, detention and/or killing of people who represent collective struggles to defend territories and to achieve peoples' sovereignty for political participation and for determining the development of emancipatory political projects.

ATALC also recognises that internationalist solidarity as expressed through political action and mobilisation is the necessary response to the constant increase in brutal attacks on and violations of the rights to food, water, health, and life in general – exacerbated by the concentration of power in the hands of transnational corporations (TNCs), national elites

¹ This document is part of the collaboration between ATALC and NOAH / FoE Denmark. It draws from historical documents and publications produced by ATALC and Friends of the Earth International (FoEI) as well as the work conducted by CESTA / FoE El Salvador, Friends of the Earth Brazil, COECOceiba / FoE Costa Rica, and Haiti Survie / FoE Haiti within the collaboration. Danilo Urrea is ATALC's Regional Facilitator and Focal Point for FoEI's Internationalist Solidarity System (ISS).

and governments that are controlled by neoliberalism. This document will discuss the type of solidarity we seek to build and practice given the strategies to expand transnational control of territories and public policy that have become further entrenched through the state of emergency brought about by the global health crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic is an expression of this crisis, and its consequences and management show the unviability of neoliberalism, its doctrine and actions that go against the care of life.

The document describes responses built by peoples, their organisations and social movements, particularly mentioning convergences based on unity in diversity, trust-building, and programmatic strategic planning, as expressed in the *Continental Platform for Democracy and Against Neoliberalism*.

1.1 Understanding peoples' rights through the environmental justice lens

Discussing peoples' collective rights and their human rights entails a review of the ways these have been violated in the recent past, the causes, agents and consequences of the systematic attacks conducted in the context of systemic crises resulting from the imposition of neoliberalism.

In line with FoEI's vision as a federation of organisations fighting for environmental, social, economic, and gender justice, ATALC believes that *"Human Rights concepts should be situated within lived experience as expressed through the political economics of production and social reproduction within society and nature. Human Rights concepts must take into account existing contradictions and forces within and among societies that render the violations of peoples' rights invisible, such as class conflict, patriarchy, sexism, racism, social discrimination and exclusion, and neo-colonialism."*²

Thus, the basis for defending rights takes into account the impacts of capital accumulation, of all forms of oppression and exploitation. It highly values the role that social movements have played in general, and particularly the peoples' feminist

² Friends of the Earth International Conceptual Framework: In Defence of Peoples' Collective Rights and Defenders of Territories, December 2017.

movement, in articulating system change as a necessary transformation for the care of life, and for dismantling the system that kills, jails, dispossesses, threatens and destroys ways of life that are opposed to its zeal for profit and accumulation.

Therefore, environmental justice must include the struggle against the violation of peoples' rights - attacks on the right to land, healthy food, water, self-determination, maintaining ancestral and traditional practices - as well as the human rights of political subjects working to defend these collective rights - guaranteeing their right to life, freedom, human dignity, and the entire breadth of human rights.

1.2 Why look at peoples' rights and their human rights through an environmental lens?

Current reality is marked by injustice and violence against the popular working classes and against collective popular political subjects. In this setting, we are witnessing the judicialisation of politics [understood as the reliance on courts and judicial means for addressing core moral predicaments, public policy questions, and political controversies]. This phenomenon takes place through abhorrent processes that deploy judicial institutionality and its tools to prevent political action.

One example of this was the jailing of Brazil's former president Luiz Inacio Lula Da Silva in order to quash his presidential aspirations. The trend to see statutory law as the only way to respond to the violation of rights reveals the judicial system's supremacy; this has roots in the origins of international law, starting with the work of Francisco de Vitoria.³

Statutory law, and those who enforce it in an orthodox manner, approach human rights violations based on the individualisation of the subjects who suffer them. From this conception, methodologies are developed that seek accountability for violations but are stripped of the specific political contexts in which they take place. They also ignore the collective vision of the social actions that give rise to violence against people who

³ For more information on this concept, please see Francisco Vitoria's doctrine on just war, for example: *Relectio de iure belli o Paz dinámica*: Escuela Española de la Paz: Primera generación, 1526-1560. Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1981.

represent collective – not individual – struggles. Counter to the reductionist approach that we have seen in some human rights advocacy efforts, our proposal involves an understanding of violations of collective rights, of peoples’ rights, that relate directly to the themes within environmental justice – violations of environmental and territorial rights. Specifically, collective actions organised to defend sovereignty and the commons have led to acts of violence that result in killings, jailing, stigmatisation, etc. – flagrant violations of the human rights of political subjects that represent collective struggles.



We have seen how violence (de facto, political, and institutional) is used to intimidate organised popular subjects, at times effectively forcing them to give up their demands and – ultimately – withdraw from participating in politics and/or in the construction of public policy. These forms of violence also serve to intimidate popular subjects so that they distance themselves from the consolidation of collective processes for self-determination and sovereign decision-making regarding the management of natural resources and their territories or socially constructed spaces.

1.3 ATALC's vision for responding to the violations of peoples' rights and their human rights

Thus, ATALC identified the need to confront rights violations with a convergence of peoples at the local, national, regional, and international level. This entails solidarity as a concrete action to achieve a militant internationalism that is committed to caring for life, in permanent alert, and effectively coordinated in order to achieve justice in all its dimensions. It is not only a matter of analysing violations and identifying the agents that determine them and make them happen. To prevent violations, we need to take collective action to respond and bring those responsible to justice, ending the increasingly widespread impunity.



Neoliberalism's attacks and threats to democracy and to peoples' rights and their human rights during the COVID-19 pandemic

2.1 State of Emergency and COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic created a global health crisis provoked by capitalism's neoliberal phase and the consequences of its production and consumption model. The responses from the right – in its diverse expressions – took the form of structural adjustment policies without any support for people dying of hunger because they could not work due to the quarantine rules. Of course, women suffered more exploitation and violence, and they lost the right to essential public services and education for their children.

In many countries governed by the right, different types of states of emergency were imposed. These have been used at various times in modern history, decreed by sovereigns (presidents and the executive powers developed in the modern State) based on the privileges conferred to them by the law and enshrined in national constitutions and specific legislation. Through the state of emergency, human beings are uniformly subjected to the right to death and the power over life wielded by sovereigns legally empowered to operate such a declaration.



Photo: Amigos da Terra Brasil/AT Brasil

Through the temporary suspension of the rule of law, sovereigns use the legal sphere as a tool to suspend the legal order established in the prevailing state political model (in the national constitutions). This empowers sovereigns to issue new decrees – such as those issued within declarations of economic, health, and environmental emergencies – that are valid in the legal sphere but from that moment onwards, they are legitimised as unique decisions of the executive branch and are protected by the state of emergency.⁴

In the different countries that declared a state of emergency, the issued decrees included total or partial restrictions of movement as well as social, economic, and environmental emergency – among other aspects related to the extraordinary situation attributed to the pandemic. A detailed analysis of the package of restrictions implemented in countries where the right has executive and parliamentary (legislative) control reveals the re-allocation of jurisdictions that are essential in the regulation and guarantee of fundamental rights. For example, the emergency decrees enabled mass lay-offs, de factor labour reforms, changes in regulations related to remote work that favoured the platform / gig economy controlled by gigantic transnational actors, as well as a series of reforms that affected workers' fundamental rights.⁵

⁴ For further reading on the characteristics of suspending the rule of law and creating new laws based on executive (presidential) power, please see: Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford University Press. 1998.

⁵ A detailed analysis of these impacts can be found in the Trade Union Confederation of the Americas' (TUCA) Labor Observatory of the Americas: *Derechos Laborales en las Américas: tendencias generales desde el inicio de la pandemia*. Retrieved 29 September 2021: <https://csa-csi.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Boletin-1-ES.pdf>

In countries like Colombia, the states of emergency cleared the way for ultra-right forces to systematically assassinate and massacre. “In 2020, 91 massacres where 381 persons lost their lives were documented.”⁶ In Honduras, four members of the Garifuna community in Triunfo de la Cruz were kidnapped by gunmen wearing national police uniforms, in a post-pandemic context that saw the increase in violence against defenders of territory.⁷

In other cases, the state of emergency enabled further national or regional indebtedness due to *“policy conditions attached to loans, including cuts in public services and social protection, privatization and severe austerity programs, [that] have also caused as great if not greater harm than debt servicing, especially on women and girls, indigenous peoples and most impoverished and vulnerable people and communities. These conditions have exacerbated social conflict, criminalization of poverty, and militarization and repression.”*⁸

Generally, the states of emergency empower sovereigns to define the life and death of the working classes, of millions of people who expose themselves to different risks in order to perpetuate capitalist accumulation based on production and consumption. Today’s state of emergency may maintain the same forms of taxation as at other times in history, but it does not rely on the same technologies of power or biological threats. Future analysis beyond this document will need to further delve into how the mechanisms and calculations of the power held by neoliberalism have penetrated peoples’ biological lives – starting with the COVID-19 pandemic – with narratives that have leveraged fear and confinement (voluntary or mandatory) as coercion to dismantle and push back popular uprisings.

⁶ Forero, Lyda and Urrea, Danilo. Colombia’s popular uprisings: Background, political subjects, and perspectives towards the future Published by TNI: <https://www.tni.org/en/article/colombias-popular-uprisings> Statistics drawn from: <http://www.indepaz.org.co/informe-de-masacres-en-colombia-durante-el-2020-2021/>

⁷ For more information, please see: <https://www.foei.org/internationalist-solidarity-with-the-garifuna-community-in-honduras/>

⁸ Nansen, Karin y Urrea, Danilo. Lo que está en juego en América Latina y el Caribe: perspectiva desde la justicia ambiental. 2020. Publicado en: www.atalc.org.

An analysis of governmental narratives will enable a deeper understanding of the technologies of power used. Additionally, an analysis of the political discourse during the height of the states of emergency will provide a level of understanding beyond what we know so far regarding the use of discourse as a tool for biological and political control.

The objective existence of a disease that claims the lives of thousands of people – mainly impoverished, women, Black, Indigenous, migrants – cannot be denied. However, we will be forced to account for the ways in which the disease has been used – legally, discursively and materially – to force people into confinement without guarantees for the exercise of rights or to appeal to individual responsibility. Additionally, we will be challenged to explain how the pandemic set the ground for experimenting with new forms of capital accumulation through the platform / gig economy and through surveillance capitalism and its new forms of accumulation that are part of the digital age’s technological tsunami.

2.2 Criminalisation as a mechanism for systematic violations and abuse

A review of the violations of peoples’ rights experienced in countries such as Colombia, Honduras, Brazil, Mexico, Costa Rica, etc. – violations against collective popular political subjects as well as against social organisations and movements – shows that these are systematic, taking into account the methods, times, and places in which these attacks take place. Violations of the rights to water or to healthy food, for example, as well as killings, femicides⁹, imprisonments, persecutions, among other atrocities, take place in contexts in which TNCs express interest in, or carry out, the exploitation of peoples’ natural heritage, and in which people organise and resist in an attempt to prevent or halt territorial destruction.

⁹ Translator’s Note: The original document in Spanish uses both *femicidio* and *feminicidio* (“femicide” and “feminicide”) noting that they are used differently depending on the country in Latin America, sometimes due to the way the crime is legally defined in a specific national context. Throughout the English translation, we have left the term as “femicide”.

The killings of Berta Caceres, Bety Cariño, Mariano Abarca, Miguel Angel Pabon Pabon – among many other defenders of territory – and the more recent forced disappearance of the Garifuna comrades from Triunfo de la Cruz, as well as the methods used to commit these brutal crimes (usually with hired assassins) also show the systematic nature of the strategies. All of the persons named, among the hundreds more we could mention, opposed dam construction, mineral exploitation, or other mechanisms of the mining-energy and agro-industrial extractive model. They were also defenders of territories and represented the collective struggles of their communities or organised processes.

Although most of the murders remain in impunity, legal proceedings in a few cases – such as that of Berta Caceres – have exposed the masterminds of the crimes as persons connected to extractive projects. Other cases are currently included in lawsuits against TNCs accused of participating in the decisions or in the acts, as in the case of Mariano Abarca in Mexico regarding the Canadian mining company Blackfire. Unfortunately, not only are violations of peoples’ rights and their human rights systematic, so is impunity.



Most cases are never solved, or are presented as isolated incidents in which the defenders are stripped of their political status, appealing to discursive fallacies such as those used by the Colombian government to dismiss the massacres of social activists as “collective homicides”.¹⁰

Given the systematic violations of peoples’ rights and the existing connection with the defence of territory organised by the political subjects who are attacked, we can affirm the existence of a mechanism of criminalisation in Latin America. This mechanism includes the participation of paramilitary groups (private security and State-controlled agents) that protect TNC’s interests or facilitate dispossession or displacement of territories desired by the corporations in order to impose their mining-energy and agro-industrial projects. Recent events in the Aguan region of Honduras are an example of this reprehensible phenomenon.¹¹

2.3 TNCs, criminal practises, and the architecture of impunity

The architecture of impunity for TNCs has been consolidated through the imposition of rules, laws, and treaties that enable the privatisation, commodification, and financialization of nature and of public services, as well as through the injection of corporate investments in territories with the complicity of national States, ensuring that there will be no justice or reparations for violations of peoples’ rights. The transnational practices are accompanied by political influence and mandates that protect TNC’s interests and their criminal actions. The power of TNCs is seen in the concentration of production; the financialization of the economy and the resulting financialization of nature; control over development aid – where, in specific contexts, TNCs use their political influence to turn aid into a “counter-insurgent” strategy to attack any voice that opposes their interests; advocacy for creating global governance that ensures impunity; the imposition of false market solutions to ensure capital accumulation based on territorial control; and TNC’s broad influence in shaping trade agendas and treaties.¹²

¹⁰ <https://www.dw.com/es/duque-en-colombia-no-hay-masacres-sino-homicidios-colectivos/a-54662098>

¹¹ <https://rwr.fm/interviews/honduran-peasants-suffer-violent-evictions-in-aguan/>

¹² For further information and analysis on this, please see: Nansen, Karin and Urrea, Danilo. Lo que está en juego en América Latina y el Caribe: perspectiva desde la justicia ambiental. 2020. Published by ATALC: https://atalc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/DOC_ATALC_2021_EnJuego_FINAL.pdf.

2.4 Coups d'états, militarisation and territorial dispossession

During the first decades of the 21st century, neoliberalism and ultra-right forces launched a series of attacks on democracy in Latin America. Specifically, several coups d'états took place, orchestrated by national reactionary forces allied with regional structures and sectors of the United States. The coups perpetrated in Haiti (2004), Honduras (2009), Paraguay (2012), Brazil (2016) and Bolivia (2019) expose the criminal practice used by the right to take power against the will of the people and outside the formal mechanisms established by the same liberal democracies that neoliberalism claims to defend.

TNC interests are also apparent in the coups, as can be observed in Paraguay, Brazil and Bolivia – countries that were of particular interest due to the natural heritage that TNCs consider strategic resources for their value chains, such as oil or lithium. Phenomena linked to violence committed by police and military forces take place before, during, and after the coup; collective political subjects are always the ones who suffer violations of their human rights, especially the popular working classes, women, and young people.

Through their tenacity and their struggle, some peoples have been able to reverse the right's illegitimate and violent seizure of power. However, these criminal processes facilitate the control of essential ecosystem and strategic territories. This control remains for the long term, as the architecture of impunity protects TNCs through the agreements and treaties signed during the period in which the national economies were controlled by authoritarian powers. In situations like in Honduras, it took more than a decade for the peoples of the Central American country to reverse the 2009 coup, bringing Xiomara Castro to the presidency in 2021. But the years between the coup d'état and the return to democracy allowed TNCs to plunder the country, enabled the extinction of Indigenous Peoples and Garifuna communities, and saw the systematic increase of violence against women by police agents and other actors,¹³ among other atrocities.

¹³ <https://atalc.org/2021/11/17/exigimos-garantias-ante-el-proximo-proceso-electoral/>



The violent seizure of power by reactionary sectors and the right is not the only context for militarisation in the region. In Colombia, considered a “democratic” country, militarisation has long been used as a tool for dispossession, in addition to paramilitary territorial control promoted by the State and its military and police forces. For example, the 1997 dispossession of lands in the Bajo Atrato Chocoano region was organised through an operation called Genesis. This was a military-paramilitary coordinated action to displace 3,000 people from the Black community of Cacarica and take their lands to install oil palm projects owned by paramilitary businesspeople,¹⁴ and for territorial control by military-paramilitary agents associated with all types of illicit activities. Unfortunately, this is only one example among hundreds that we could describe.

¹⁴ For more information, see: <https://www.justiciapazcolombia.com/operacion-genesis-5/>

In countries like El Salvador, militarisation has become a tool to attack peoples' historical victories and the direction that society has sought to manage the commons. President Nayib Bukele's authoritarianism is known worldwide. He even militarised the Legislative Assembly on 9 February 2020 in order to pressure elected representatives to approve a loan that served his interests and went against society's demands. In recent years, El Salvador experienced a coup on the country's institutionality, with the executive power leveraging State forces to commit violence, as well as stigmatising and persecuting social activists.



3

Violations of peoples' rights and their human rights in the region

(Attacks on women's rights)

This section presents key findings from recent research conducted in El Salvador, Brazil, Costa Rica, and Haiti regarding violations of peoples' rights and their human rights, primarily in the context of the global health crisis.¹⁵

Of course, those four countries are not the only ones in the region where violations take place. As we have seen, the actions of TNCs in many Latin American and Caribbean countries, with the complicity of some governments, have created a dramatic situation. Some countries have become extremely dangerous places for defending territories and for social environmental activism. According to Global Witness, in 2020, over half of documented attacks took place in just three countries; unfortunately, Mexico and Colombia are among them. *"In Mexico, we documented 30 lethal attacks against land and environmental defenders in 2020, a 67% increase from 2019. Logging was linked to almost a third of these attacks, and half of all the attacks in the country*

¹⁵ The extensive research documents are available for full review. Here, we provide a detailed account of the elements we believe are most relevant and which we consider pertinent for readers of this document that is regional in scope.

were directed against Indigenous communities.” [...] “For the second year in a row, Colombia saw the highest number of killings in 2020, with 65 land and environmental defenders murdered. These took place in the context of widespread attacks on human rights defenders and community leaders across the country.”¹⁶

3.1 El Salvador

As we mentioned earlier, **militarisation and security** have been used as control mechanisms in the country in recent years. In addition to the militarisation of the Legislative Assembly, the national police force has also been instrumentalised for political purposes. In view of what happened in the Assembly, the Attorney General of the Republic warned about dangers to the constitutional order and risks to the rule of law and the division of powers.

During the pandemic, the State security forces focused on managing public order rather than providing support for the health crisis, and the president used military force for political purposes, playing an inappropriate protagonist role during the unfolding of a health emergency. Activating the Armed Forces to address the pandemic led to acts of repression against ordinary people; one notable incident was the so-called health barrier set up in Puerto de La Libertad, prohibiting access to the town for 48 hours. Rather than sending healthcare personnel to the town, the government deployed a large heavily armed military convoy claiming they were needed in order to enforce the rule that people must stay inside their homes, without any exceptions for humanitarian treatment of the pandemic.

The borders were completely cordoned off in the northern part of the country, and the border with Honduras was militarised. Citizens of El Salvador were denied the right of entry to vote in the February 2021 elections. Rural residents denounced that their communities were cordoned off to prevent them from participating in the elections.

¹⁶ Drawn from: <https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/environmental-activists/last-line-defence/>



Human rights violations also took place through **femicides and other forms of violence against women**. According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), only 6.3% of the measures implemented by Bukele’s government included gender-differentiated components. One measure was the creation of the 126 Hotline for help in situations of violence, which was disseminated 45 days after the mandatory confinement began. The hotline responded to situations of violence during office hours, expanding its hours to 7am - 10pm on 11 May. It is important to note that – as is well known – violence does not keep office hours, and it is the State’s responsibility to ensure immediate assistance 24 hours a day, particularly in situations of mandatory confinement.¹⁷

¹⁷ Heinrich Böll Stiftung 2021. Impactos de la pandemia Covid-19 en la fragilidad democrática. <https://sv.boell.org/es/2021/05/05/impactos-de-la-pandemia-covid-19-en-la-fragilidad-democratica>

Between January and December 2020, 130 femicides were committed, 56 of them between April and August, coinciding with the lock-down – the period during which contact between women and their attackers increased.¹⁸ That same year, 9,176 acts of violence against women were recorded between 1 January and 30 June; 2,320 of the incidents involved sexual violence.¹⁹

Beyond the pandemic, women in El Salvador face sexist violence, systematic infringements of the rule of law, and the advance of an authoritarianism that denies women’s human rights.

The number of femicides continued to rise in 2021. According to the Ministry of Justice and Public Security, between January and August 2021, femicides increased by 16.6% compared to the same period the year before.²⁰



Photo: CESTA/AT El Salvador

¹⁸ ORMUSA, Observatory on Violence Against Women 2021. <https://observatoriodeviolenciaormusa.org/monitoreo-de-medios/#32-280-wpfd-2020>
¹⁹ Ministry of Defense and Public Security, 2020. Informe Semestral Enero-Junio 2020: Hechos de Violencia Contra las Mujeres. Sistema Nacional de Datos, Estadísticas e Información de Violencia Contra Las Mujeres. <https://www.seguridad.gob.sv/dia/informe-de-hechos-de-violencia-contra-las-mujeres/>
²⁰ Ministry of Defense and Public Security, 2020. Informe Anual: Hechos de Violencia Contra las Mujeres. Sistema Nacional de Datos, Estadísticas e Información de Violencia Contra Las Mujeres. <https://www.seguridad.gob.sv/dia/informe-de-hechos-de-violencia-contra-las-mujeres/>

Despite the entry into force in 2012 of two laws seeking to protect women (the Law on Equality, Equity for a life free from violence for women and the Comprehensive Special Law to eradicate violence against women), the country's public institutions continue to fail at providing effective responses to women's rights violations. The actions taken do not comply with the guarantees enshrined in the laws and in the Constitution of the Republic.

Another point of concern is that **the human right to water** in El Salvador has yet to be ratified in the Constitution. For several decades, social movements and organisations have demanded an institutional framework to prevent the privatisation and commodification of water. Instead, the threats have grown and have become increasingly visible.

During the most alarming times of the pandemic, as the president announced a national lock-down and the World Health Organisation (WHO) was promoting frequent hand-washing as the best defence against the virus, many communities in the San Salvador metropolitan area were experiencing prolonged interruptions to their water services – some communities faced up to 22 hours without water.

The lack of political will to enshrine the right to water, and the advance of privatisation in all its expressions, has left El Salvador with the lowest rate of fresh water per capita in Mesoamerica. The population of El Salvador suffers from unequal access to water, with higher impacts on those with fewer economic resources and with greater vulnerabilities. Approximately 618,000 people in rural areas lack access to drinking water, and fewer than 60% have running water in their households.

While peoples are denied their fundamental right, the corporations that produce soft drinks and alcoholic beverages consume millions of litres of water a day, a clear environmental injustice and a violation of peoples' rights.

Social organisations in the Mesoamerican country denounced that in November 2021, around seven leaders in the community of Hacienda La Labor in the Ahuachapan department were **captured, charged, and imprisoned** for opposing the extraction and drilling of water wells by the Fenix company.





The General Law on water resources approved on 21 December 2021 was denounced by social organisations as a tool for privatisation. The drafting and approval of the law ignored the inputs from the Movement of Victims and People Affected by Climate Change and Corporations (MOVIAC for its acronym in Spanish) submitted to the Legislative Assembly. MOVIAC’s proposals included the creation of a department inside the water authority whose purpose would be to ensure the availability of water throughout El Salvador; this goal would necessitate the protection and rehabilitation of water territories. MOVIAC also proposed the creation of another department to ensure that water reaches everyone, meaning that economic considerations should not determine decision-making.

Social movements have converged around the struggle for water, linking their demands and strengthening collaboration mechanisms to promote peoples’ effective participation in public policy-making and peoples’ control over the management and care for water territories. Thus, movements continue to categorically oppose violations of the fundamental right to water, and continue to develop proposals and initiatives to ensure public and community control and management of water heritage.

3.2 Brasil

Brazil is once again experiencing hunger, with record rates of severe **food insecurity** that are similar to 2004. A study by the PenSANN Network²¹ found that 116.8 million out of 211.7 million people living in Brazil lived with some degree of food insecurity (mild, moderate or severe), between October and December 2020. Among them, 43.4 million people did not have sufficient food to satisfy their needs, which is classified as moderate or severe food insecurity. At the height of the pandemic, 19 million people experienced hunger (severe food insecurity).

The situation is even worse among the most impoverished, such as Indigenous Peoples. Between 2019 and 2020, out of 352 children under five who died from malnutrition, at least 24 were Yanomami children, representing 7% of these deaths, when the Yanomami Peoples make up only 0.013% of the Brazilian population.



Photo: Amigos da Terra Brasil/AT Brasil

²¹ http://olheparaafome.com.br/VIGISAN_LO1_Inseguridad_Alimentaria_y_Covid-19_en_Brasil.pdf

The economic crisis is a consequence of the actions and omissions of Jair Bolsonaro's ultra-right wing government, and of the neoliberal policies implemented since Michel Temer took office through a coup in 2016. For example, prices around the world increased during the pandemic, but the Bolsonaro government made the impacts of this global problem much greater. According to the Inter-Trade Union Department of Statistics and Socioeconomic Studies (DIEESE for its acronym in Portuguese), *"these shocks on general prices were amplified by the government's disastrous economic policy: the exchange rate policy, which enabled a serious speculative devaluation of the Brazilian Real against the US Dollar (when the balance of payments was comfortable); the absence of a policy to maintain regulatory stocks to avoid shortages of domestic agricultural products; subordinating Petrobras' pricing policy to generating profits and dividends for shareholders – domestic and foreign; [and] the lack of an energy crisis management policy, which allowed the depletion of the reservoirs of the main hydroelectric plants and created a real risk of blackouts."*²²

We must also note other **setbacks on environmental justice**. The Parliamentary Front for Agriculture and Livestock (known as the Rural Caucus – Caucus Rural in Portuguese) has prioritised the agribusiness agendas, seeking to privilege agribusiness to the detriment of Brazil's biomes.

Agribusiness broke its own profit records in the middle of the crisis in 2020, and continues to push its interests in Congress and in the Executive Branch. Its priority agendas include ending environmental permitting; legalising the theft of public land; complete deregulation of pesticides; halting land reform and destroying any possibility for reform in the future; and ending the recognition of indigenous lands.

The scenario for environmental justice struggles in Brazil has become worse under a government that, in its first months, had already succeeded in becoming an international environmental villain. Even worse, the pandemic was seen as an opportunity to attack environmental laws and institutions. Instead of using the full potential of the Unified Health System (Brazil's public healthcare system – SUS for its acronym in Portuguese) to fight the pandemic and be a positive example for the region, the Bolsonaro government chose to take advantage of the health crisis to roll back environmental protection.

²² Boletim de Conjuntura, N° 30 - agosto/setembro de 2021.

With a militarised government, **the Armed Forces were used to ensure the total failure of efforts to defend the Amazonia region.** In April 2020, General Hamilton Mourão – vice president of the Republic of Brazil and president of the National Council for the Legal Amazon (CNAL for its acronym in Portuguese) – asked Bolsonaro for an operation to Guarantee Law and Order (GLO for its acronym in Portuguese) to tackle deforestation and fires in Amazonia. A series of reports by journalist Julia Dolce published in *OpenDemocracy*²³ exposed how this operation did the exact opposite of its supposed purpose. The military was accused of, among other things, weakening the monitoring of environmental crimes, politically persecuting employees of environmental agencies, and denialism of the pandemic.

The scenario in Brazil has become one on **violence and criminalisation against defenders of peoples' rights and their human and environmental rights.** Global Witness found that the South American giant registered the highest number of environmentalists killed in 2015 (50), 2016 (49) and 2017 (57). With a record number of lethal attacks documented worldwide in 2020, Brazil ranked fourth in the number of attacks on environmental activists, with 20 murders – in a context where three-fourths of the murders registered worldwide took place in Latin America.

In relation to land conflicts in 2020, the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT for its acronym in Portuguese)²⁴ found that 81,225 families suffered land invasions, of which 72% (58,327) are indigenous families; 19,489 suffered land grabbing (37% indigenous); and 25,559 were victims of illegal deforestation (60% indigenous).

²³ <https://www.opendemocracy.net/pt/cinzas-da-verde-brasil/>

²⁴ <https://www.cptnacional.org.br/>



Photo: Amigos da Terra Brasil/AT Brasil

Conflicts caused by the federal government soared in 2020, reaching 311. In a hearing at the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), Antonio Neto – researcher at Justiça Global and part of the Economic, Social, Cultural and Environmental Human Rights Platform in Brazil (Plataforma DHESCA for its acronym in Portuguese) – asserted: *“Jair Bolsonaro’s statements against Indigenous Peoples, Quilombolas, Black and social movements like the Landless Movement [MST for its acronym in Portuguese] [serve to] delegitimise, [and thus] cause negative impacts and worsen the environment of hostility and intimidation faced by rights defenders and people in collectives.”* [Own translation.]

At the hearing, Neto denounced the difficulties facing the National Programme for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, among them:

- Lack of public policies that address structural matters related to the conflicts.
- Insufficient investigation and lack of effective accountability for cases of threats, attacks, criminalisation, and killings that involve defenders.
- Institutional fragility due to the lack of a legal framework and budget matters related to the programme's lack of continuity.
- Inconsistent risk assessment methodologies and the low effectiveness of protection measures due to a lack of dialogue on the concrete needs for protection.
- Absence of effective strategies for persons, groups, and communities whose specific needs are not taken into account; there are no dedicated measures for women, LGBTQIA+ people, *Quilombolas* or Indigenous Peoples.

The figures and information contained in the reports of various human rights organisations in Brazil leave no doubt as to the causes of the increase in threats to the life and integrity of community leaders throughout the country: the Bolsonaro government is the main promoter of violence in the countryside.



Regarding the situation of **women**, violence and movement restrictions were a reality even before the pandemic. For poor working women who live in the outskirts of cities and who were not able to comply with social isolation, daily life was full of uncertainty regarding unemployment, tensions regarding care tasks in the home, and an overload of domestic work. The increase in the amount of time people spend in the same house exacerbates patriarchal power relations that divide men and women and normalise inequality.

Additionally, the lock-down led to a reduction in services to address violence against women, as well as the weakening of community support networks and less protection from friends and family members.

In a survey on the victimisation of women in Brazil conducted by the Brazilian Forum for Public Safety (FBSP for its acronym in Portuguese), women reported that due to the pandemic, they stayed at home more (56.7%), and they experienced more stress in this environment (50.9%). “One in four (24.4%) Brazilian women over the age of 16 said they had suffered some kind of violence or abuse in the last 12 months during the Covid-19 pandemic.”²⁵



Photo: Rodrigo Duarte

²⁵ Visível e Invisível: A Vitimização de Mulheres no Brasil - 3ª edição - 2021”, Samira Bueno, Juliana Martins, Amanda Pimentel, Amanda Lagreca, Betina Barros, Renato Sérgio de Lima. Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2021

Among women who suffered some type of violence:

- 72,8%** Were attacked by someone they know.
- 48,8%** Said the violence took place at home, and 19.9% said the violence took place on the street.
- 61,8%** Saw their family's income reduced. Perdió su empleo.
- 46,7%** Lost their jobs.
- 39,2%** Expressed their fear of losing their job and not be able to pay the bills.
- 50,8%** Believes the pandemic aggravated the violence they suffered. - 25.1% consider that job loss, or the impossibility of working to guarantee an income, influenced the occurrence of the violence suffered, while 21.8% reported spending more time in the house with the abuser.

The women's movement sees a link between increased domestic violence during the pandemic and increased exploitation in the home. Isolation makes women more vulnerable to sexist violence. When housework and care work increases, it becomes more difficult to subvert the logic of power relations and seek a better division of labour with family or other household members.

Thus, in addition to ensuring public policies that protect women, we must broaden the debate about violence against women and the social relations and situations it involves. To this end, the women's movement advocates for community solidarity and self-organisation, as this enables women to build collective ways out of violent relationships.



3.3. Costa Rica

Costa Rica's political and institutional capacities have eroded, making it impossible to implement public policies that address structural problems including high levels of inequality, territorial conflicts over strategic resources, impoverishment, and gender-based violence.

The rapid and deep economic contraction during first months of the COVID-19 crisis led to immediate losses of jobs and income as well as the closing of businesses, exacerbating the pre-existing fiscal crisis in the country. Although the initial effects were felt broadly, the worst impacts fell on the most vulnerable people and territories. The government attempted to counter the situation through a series of economic policy measures – mainly monetary, fiscal, labour and regulatory measures focused on the preservation of macroeconomic stability.²⁶

The government's proposals also included initiating conversations with multilateral institutions to obtain budget support funds for 2020, such as the negotiation of the Extended Fund Facility loan with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). These negotiations triggered a broad national citizens' movement that rejected the government's compulsive public borrowing and demanded tax justice.²⁷

The pandemic exacerbated the employment and income problems of the majority, but the effects were unevenly distributed across the population and sectors of the country. Women have historically lagged behind in terms of employment opportunities, and their situation is considerably more pressing. It is worth recalling that the unequal participation of women in the economy – and in other areas of life – systematically poses unresolved challenges in the country, experienced individually as disadvantaged participation in the different spheres (labour, political, social, family, and personal). It materialises in the higher number of hours that women dedicate to unpaid housework, and the pandemic aggravated this situation.

The biggest effect of the pandemic on the labour market was felt in the second quarter of 2020, when the crisis broke out in the country. There were more than 230,000 unemployed women, 120,000 newly unemployed, and 137,000 women expelled from the labour market.

²⁶ State of the Nation Program 2020. Informe Estado de la Nación 2020. Consejo Nacional de Rectores. – San José, C.R. CONARE – PEN. file:///C:/Users/ingvi/Downloads/PEN_informe_estado_nacion_version_digital_2020.pdf

²⁷ <https://www.coecoceiba.org/fecon-llamado-del-ecologismo-costarricense-justicia-tributaria-para-salir-de-la-crisis/>



Another major problem is violence against women, girls, and adolescents from all backgrounds and in all their diversity. The conditions under which they lived during the pandemic exacerbated the risks for girls and for other feminised bodies and identities that experience violence in and outside the home. The years 2020 and 2021 were marked by femicide. As of 16 December 2021, 62 violent deaths of women were recorded. Among them, thirteen were officially recognised as femicides (nine classified as such under Article 21 of the Law on the Criminalisation of Violence against Women and four classified as expanded femicides) and twelve were registered as homicides since they were not considered femicides according to the Inter-institutional Sub-commission for the Prevention of Femicide. The remaining 37 deaths have not yet been classified, pending police and expert reports or review.²⁸

²⁸ Observatory on Gender Based Violence Against Women and Access to Justice. Femicidio. <https://observatoriodegenero.poder-judicial.go.cr/index.php/soy-especialista-y-busco/estadisticas/femicidio>

Between July 2019 and June 2020, 47.6% of households (763,190) experienced some degree of food insecurity, in a clear **violation of the right to food**. This means that they faced constraints in obtaining sufficient food or meals due to lack of money or other resources.²⁹ The majority of food insecure households were located outside of the country's centre. The Pacifico Central, Huetar Norte, and Chorotega regions reported the most severe situation. At some point in time, and in more than half of these households, one or more members went hungry or ate less than necessary.

Meanwhile, businesspeople, politicians, importers of poisons, and transnational corporations attempted to bend the law to allow the uncontrolled **entry of toxic agrochemicals into the country**, already known as the most heavily fumigated country in the world. In the midst of the COVID-19 health crisis, they tried to expand the entry of toxic agrochemicals, bypassing legal provisions, technical regulations, recommendations of the Comptroller General of the Republic, open proceedings in the Constitutional Chamber, and, of course, science-based risk assessments.³⁰



Photo: COECOCEIBA/AT Costa Rica

²⁹ National Institute of Statistics, INEC, 2020. Encuesta Nacional de Hogares julio 2020: Resultados generales [online version]. San José, Costa Rica. <https://www.inec.cr/encuestas/encuesta-nacional-de-hogares>

³⁰ <http://izquierdaweb.cr/nacional/agrotoxicos-y-pandemia-la-revanca-de-la-anti-ciencia-en-costa-rica/>

Agribusiness seeks to profit from the health, economic, and social crisis, benefitting a few representatives of well-known business associations at the expense of the human and environmental health of the entire country. It is regrettable that the government is acting in a non-transparent manner in the midst of the Covid-19 emergency, and that, instead of following legal provisions and the technical and scientific arguments in favour of life, it is once again putting agribusiness above public health.

Current **conflicts over land in indigenous territories** are an extension of an unresolved situation since the Spanish colonial invasion in the 16th century. Despite legislative progress with the 1977 Indigenous Law No. 6162, in which the State declared indigenous territories as “inalienable and imprescriptible, non-transferable and exclusive of the indigenous communities that inhabit them”, allegations of serious violations of Indigenous Peoples’ rights over their lands, territories, and natural resources continue and have worsened over the years.

Due to the State institutions’ lack of political will to legalise lands – demonstrated, among other factors, by the failure to pass the draft law on Indigenous Peoples’ autonomous development, Indigenous Peoples were forced to reclaim their lands through other means. This situation increased attacks, threats, forced displacements, and even led to the killing of two indigenous leaders between 2019 and 2020.

Indigenous Peoples remain in resistance despite permanent threats and attacks from usurpers; divisions promoted by the government; the non-recognition of their own authorities; crony and patronage politics; the invasion of religions that do not respect their worldview and spirituality; the imposition of education and healthcare systems that ignore their knowledge and ancient wisdom; the imposition of public policies that disrespect their customs and ways of life; racism and hatred.³¹

In this context, the pandemic continues to expose huge social inequalities that disproportionately affect Indigenous Peoples. Discrimination, the social opportunity gap, and the historical debt have weighed even heavier during the global health crisis.

³¹ FRENAPI (septiembre, 2021). FRENAPI: 30 meses del asesinato de Sergio Rojas Ortiz
¡Nada que celebrar! Bicentenario de un estado excluyente y racista.
<https://www.facebook.com/306824652789688/photos/a.421126021359550/2255062004632600/>

In addition to the challenges Costa Rica was already facing to improve its sustainability due to the dynamics described above, a set of risks and pressures resurfaced in response to the difficult political, institutional, economic and fiscal situation during the pandemic. This included pressure to reactivate extractivist activities (e.g. mining and oil); infringement of human rights related to the environment, such as food sovereignty and citizen participation;³² the easing of environmental requirements or regulations; the reduction of public capacities for control and oversight; as well as the promotion (as a result of increased poverty) of survival practices that are unfavourable to nature.

3.4 Haití

Jovenel Moise's presidency (7 February 2017 - 7 July 2021³³) left the Republic stuck between arbitrariness and complete denial of peoples' rights. The country experienced serious deficits in the rule of law, expressed through unprecedented levels of violence, a constitutional crisis that paralysed most State institutions while the judicial system was regularly on strike due to protest movements led by judges, administrative staff, etc. Additionally, the country faced a serious governability crisis.

Several situations demonstrate the severity of the crisis, including the systematic repression of the opposition; killings of people from the opposition during street demonstrations; numerous attacks launched by armed gangs under the protection of governmental authorities; confrontations between rival armed gangs in Port au Prince; the assassination of the president of the Port au Prince Bar Association, Monferier Dorval; the detention of Supreme Court Judge Yvickel Dabresil; the removal of three Supreme Court judges; as well as death threats and intimidation of judges who were investigating crimes allegedly involving family members of the former president of the Republic.

³² FFECON, 2021. Rutas de Recuperación justa. Virtual Dialogues 2021. Boletín N°6. Participación social en decisiones públicas.

³³ It is worth remembering that armed retired Colombian military and paramilitary commandos assassinated Jovenel Moise in Port au Prince on 7 July 2021.



Photo: COECOCEIBA/AT Costa Rica

Added to these events is the reality that the most vulnerable communities in the country have faced **environmental threats**, particularly those related to **broad deforestation, limited access to drinking water, and soil erosion**. This has significantly increased the challenges faced by several communities, even reducing their capacity to feed themselves.

According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), nearly 4.1 million Haitians – more than a third of the population – live in conditions of food insecurity, and 2.1% of children suffer from severe malnutrition. Scarce rainfall, exacerbated by temperature rises due to the climate crisis, has permanently affected a large part of the country.

The Haitian authorities' management of the COVID-19 context raised serious doubt regarding human rights guarantees. After the first two coronavirus cases were confirmed in March 2020, then President Jovenel Moïse used an order issued by the Council of Ministries to declare a month-long countrywide state of health emergency.

The Moïse - Joseph administration then extended the state of emergency for a further month (20 April - 20 May), adding other measures. Several human rights organisations denounced the violation of fundamental human rights and good governance principles, without results to justify the funds spent during the period. Meanwhile, people were forced to stay at home without any concrete humanitarian aid.

The state of emergency was not regulated by any law, which is a violation of fundamental human rights principles. Measures were adopted without any legal framework, for example a curfew of 5 to 10 hours that was declared in a press release issued by the Prime Minister. Declaring the state of emergency appeared as an opportunity for the authorities to violate good governance principles and increase corruption.

Public procurement laws were totally ignored and contracts were made without the knowledge of the High Court of Audits and Contentious Administrative Affairs (CSCCA for its acronym in French). The authorities did not take a single valid measure to address the people's problems created by the pandemic or to guarantee respect for their fundamental rights. Some government declarations created loopholes to suppress the protest movement against the government, restricting people's right to protest and – importantly – to organise.

In this context of political, economic, social, and health crisis, the government enabled and practiced the **grabbing of fertile lands in several areas of the country**. In fact, during the last years – particularly after the 12 January 2010 earthquake – TNCs along with the Haitian State and local bourgeoisie decided to develop several mega-projects (mining, industrial free-export zones, tourism, and agribusiness) that are counter to the fundamental interests of the local population.

The implementation of these projects entail the targeting of peasants in several departments across the country, especially in the North and Northeast regions; peasants have been persecuted, intimidated and violently attacked by political and judicial authorities protected by the governing party (Tèt Kale Haitian Party – PHTK for its acronym in Haitian Creole) and by large landowners.

A group of rural residents regularly grab land to benefit zealous supporters of power, provoking land conflicts in these areas and further impoverishing peasant communities whose main economic activities rely on agriculture.

An emblematic case is the presidential decree circulated in the official newspaper *Le Moniteur*, published on 8 February 2021 (the day after Moïse should have finished his term). The decree handed 8,600 hectares of land over to one family to create the Savane Diana Agro-industrial Free-Export Zone. This decision aggravated the situation of tens of thousands of peasant families who take care of the peasant economy and are responsible for the country's food sovereignty.

The Savane Diane region covers a territory that cuts across three of the most important agricultural departments in Haiti: the North, Centre, and Artibonite. Due to the region's agricultural significance, in 2018, the Agriculture Ministry labelled Savane Diane as one of five priority areas to ensure the country's food self-sufficiency. This savannah covers an area of approximately 200,000 hectares and produces all kinds of food: peas, okra, rice, peanuts, sugar cane, millet, moringa, several varieties of fruit, as well as medicinal plants whose production has been of great importance in the fight against COVID - 19.



Photo: Periódico digital centroamericano

Some of the main land-grabbing that took place during the PHTK regimen (from Joseph Michel Martelly's presidency up to Jovenel Moise's presidency) include:

- High-level officials in the Northeast department (specifically in Trou-du-Nord) who forced more than 800 families to abandon their lands to create the Agritrans S.A. Corporation headed by Moise.
- The 8 February 2021 presidential decree published in the official newspaper Le Moniteur granting more than 8,600 hectares of land for the above-mentioned Savane Diana Agro-industrial Free-Export Zone.
- The dispossession perpetrated by representatives of Moise and his wife Martine in the former Habitation Dauphin, located in the Northeast department. These lands had been cultivated by peasants in the 1980s; on 30 April 1995, President Aristide's administration granted the peasants the legal right to produce on these vast plots of land. This right was confirmed in a presidential decree published in the official newspaper Le Moniteur.



4

Responses from peoples and their social movements

4.1 Reaffirming collective popular political subjects

Latin American peoples and their social movements and organisations continue to resist dispossession and displacement as well as the systemic human rights violations discussed throughout this document.

The recent elections in Chile and Honduras, and Bolivia's reversal of the coup d'état through the October 2020 elections that returned the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS for its acronym in Spanish) to power, exemplify the results of this popular resistance.

In addition to their role in electoral scenarios, collective popular political subjects are crucial in maintaining important struggles in the region such as resisting the Free Trade Agreement between the European Union and MERCOSUR. They are also central in expressing effective solidarity with the social sectors and communities most neglected by the consequences of the neoliberal model and the pandemic to which it gave rise, accompanying the mobilisation of Indigenous Peoples in Brazil, and many other actions that sustain the possibility of contesting the political arena against the right and its criminal agents.



The results obtained through peoples' struggles in different spheres and levels encourage us to reaffirm the importance of the collective popular subject in making it possible to continue the resistances and to develop popular emancipatory proposals, initiatives and paradigms.³⁴ These have concrete expressions in different countries and at a regional level, and must continue to advance as sovereign proposals of the peoples. The protagonists of these initiatives are the peasant communities, Indigenous Peoples, Black/Afro-descendent communities, women, who together have demonstrated the viability of their processes that nurture the building of movements and people power.

³⁴ For further information on how ATALC conceptualises these initiatives, projects, and initiatives, please see: Nansen, Karin and Urrea, Danilo. ATALC and the construction of peoples' emancipatory agendas and initiatives 2020. Published by ATALC: https://atalc.org/wpcontent/uploads/2021/03/ATALC_PROYECTOSEMANCIPATORIOS_INGLES-.pdf

4.2 The Continental Platform for Democracy and Against Neoliberalism as a political subject presenting a peoples' response

Several organisations in the region initiated the Continental Platform for Democracy and Against Neoliberalism³⁵ (hereafter the Continental Platform) from an understanding of the need to develop a programmatic agenda for joint struggle through the creation of spaces for collective construction based on unity in diversity and on trust. In 2015, ten years after the victory against the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), social movements and organisations agreed on four thematic areas to confront the **power of TNCs** and **free trade** in the region, while at the same time working together to **build and defend democracy** and promote the **integration of peoples**.

The convergence of these social movements has developed based on the construction of a collective political subject that can provide jointly coordinated responses to the violations of peoples' rights in the region. These responses emerge in the context of continental mobilisation, with unified or decentralised processes, enabling dialogue and the projection of a programmatic agenda among organisations from the world of work, peasants, popular feminists, opposition to debt, etc.

³⁵ The organisations and movements that currently make up the Continental Platform are: World March of Women (WMW), Latin American Coordination of Peasant Organizations (CLOC - La Vía Campesina for its acronym in Spanish), Trade Union Confederation of the Americas (TUCA), Friends of the Earth Latin America and the Caribbean (ATALC for its acronym in Spanish), Capítulo Cubano de Organizaciones Sociales, ALBA Movimientos, Jubilee South Americas (JSA), the Movement of Peoples Affected by Dams in Latin America (MAR for its acronym in Spanish), and Grassroots Global Justice (GGJ).

During the health crisis and the movement restrictions due to the state of emergency because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the organisations and movements remained in constant communication, analysing the context and current situation, promoting internationalist solidarity with peoples affected by the violations of their rights, and maintaining connection with the territories both at the national and regional level.

The Continental Platform will continue to work to achieve an appropriate correlation of forces in the region, and to denounce the atrocities committed against the Latin American peoples, as it has done so far in relation to Honduras, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Haiti, among others. The Platform will accompany organisations advocating for the adoption of the International Legally Binding Instrument on Transnational Corporations and Human Rights (Binding Treaty), denouncing the growing power of TNCs, and developing integration proposals for peoples' sovereignty at the national, regional, and continental level.

5

Internationalist Solidarity to defend peoples' sovereignty

We understand internationalist solidarity as a political principle for convergence and action. *“Solidarity means rising and mobilising against all forms of oppression: patriarchy, class exploitation, racism, colonialism, imperialism. Collectively confronting violence committed against our peoples, which seeks to strip them of their capacity to organise and struggle.”*³⁶ Struggles for a holistic justice require solidarity with the demands of women, workers, Indigenous Peoples, and peasants, making their struggles our own, no matter where in the world they take place.

Today more than ever, we must strengthen solidarity among our peoples in defence of water and territory, in the construction of energy and food sovereignty, in the care for seeds and the promotion of agroecology, among other actions to ensure collective well-being, while in turn confronting patriarchy, racism, and colonialism.

³⁶ Part of the visions in Friends of the Earth Latin America and the Caribbean (ATALC), 2020. Unpublished document.

5.1 Reflections on FoEI's Internationalist Solidarity System and the participation of ATALC and allied movements and organisations

Over the last years, FoEI has worked with strategic allies to build an Internationalist Solidarity System (ISS). The impetus for this initiative comes from an awareness of the adverse reality facing popular subjects – not only in Latin America and the Caribbean but also in other places around the world, primarily in the Global South. We have already mentioned some elements of this reality earlier in this document. The first step in developing the ISS was to develop a political-conceptual framework regarding the rights of peoples and defenders of territory, agreeing on the need to act in a coordinated manner to confront the brutality that social activists face.

The ISS has four areas of work: political formation and education; documentation and analysis; rapid response systems; and mobilisation for political action. These elements are combined to strengthen the federation's work as well as the work with allied organisations and their own rights-defence initiatives, seeking to build effective mechanisms to make internationalist solidarity a reality and convene more actors to be part of the process.

The ISS is also developing a platform for working online that will enable access to digital tools related to the four areas of work, promoting the development of communications tools that are secure and outside corporate control. These tools should contribute to political formation in the different places of the world where threats to rights and the dynamics of violence continue to claim the lives and freedom of human rights defenders.

It is precisely due to the increasing forms of violence and criminalisation that are gradually expanding throughout Latin America and the Caribbean that we would like to present some reflections based on our work in the region as part of the construction and implementation of the ISS.

5.1.1 The permanent process of political formation is indispensable

Ongoing political formation enables collective programmatic visioning, transmission of knowledge between different generations and political subjects, and exchange of knowledge between different actors involved in the popular struggle. This has been historically emphasised and embodied by social movements that work to create popular political projects, and which have faced attacks by TNCs and other violent actors.

Analysing the context and current situation from the perspective of the realities that social movements face enables a better understanding of the needs of political subjects affected by threats to their territories and to their emancipatory initiatives; it also facilitates the development and implementation of jointly coordinated responses.

In building and consolidating the ISS, permanent political formation has enabled us to broaden knowledge and participation in the creation of this space for collective response. Its continuity is indispensable, as is the expansion of participation by different structures and regions in the Federation, the accompaniment of allied movements and organisations, and its gradual construction along with popular territorial subjects.

5.1.2 Documentation and analysis based on environmental justice programmatic categories

As discussed earlier, defending peoples' rights involves categories and demands that are specific to environmental justice, and that are in dialogue with territorial, national, and regional realities, as well as with FoEI's and ATALC's historical programmatic developments. Through the development of the ISS, we have understood the importance of documentation and analysis of rights violations using the main categories created by our International Programmes, which reflect the concrete reality in which violations take place.

Thus, the categories of privatisation, commodification, financialization of nature, land-grabbing, false solutions, etc. inform the analysis and guide the actions we must take to further environmental justice. This is relevant because documentation and analysis

of the violations is not limited to the characteristics of method, time, and place. We must locate the situation, context, and conflict in which the violations are perpetrated, and use a historical and material lens to map the relationship with agents that may be involved, as well as the characteristics of the collective struggles and their historical background with respect to environmental matters.

The documentation process must prioritise restoration of the historical memory of conflicts, actors, and violations. These are ethical and historical records that can also be used later in judicial scenarios and arenas, and that are likely to become formal proof when bringing those responsible to trial. This practice is part of our working vision, as formalising the ISS and its tools can contribute substantially to instruments such as the Binding Treaty and its possible international scenarios of transnational justice.

5.1.3 Prevention as a response

With limited resources and capacities, and in a context marked by different forms of violence against defenders in different parts of the region, the ISS has supported specific cases and has achieved results that nurture the hope of contributing – from our abilities – to safeguarding the life and integrity of political subjects at risk. Reaching this possibility entails a permanent analysis of the context in which TNCs commit their criminal acts, understanding the current situation in the territories and the risk and vulnerabilities that participating organisations and movements face. All of these aspects must also be addressed through permanent political formation.

The capacity for action to prevent risks and vulnerability that could lead to killing, deprivation of liberty, prosecutions, among other practical components of criminalisation, depends on a regular and updated analysis of the situation. This will only be possible through strategic coordination with allied movements and organisations, and with their own solidarity instruments.

5.1.4 Accompaniment and follow-up during and after situations of risk and vulnerability

One of the challenges regarding violations that we describe in this document relates to the capacity to provide accompaniment and follow-up support to collective political subjects at risk. Even if we can express internationalist solidarity once an injustice take place, a comprehensive tool needs to accompany and follow up with those who suffer violations as well as their collectives and families, using rapid response strategies and emergency support at different levels based on the magnitude of the situations that need to be addressed. FoEI has significant experience on this matter, but ever-growing threats have exposed follow up challenges.

Therefore, this is an invitation to develop the ISS collectively, to bring together experiences and capacities to respond more effectively and at a higher volume to the challenges that come from the growing power of TNCs. In this way, we can contribute to the growing resistance of peoples and their social movements.





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