

New ITUC Frontlines and Priorities

Region: Americas

Trade Union Confederation of the Americas (TUCA)

New Frontlines 2014-2018

PREMISES – CONTEXT IN THE REGION DURING THE 2014-2018 PERIOD

BACKGROUND: The dynamics and performance of trade unions during the four years that have gone by since the last ITUC Congress have been impacted by the political, economic and social landscape in the region. People have been hard hit by the deepening economic crises affecting most countries in the region, with the rise in unemployment, informality and precarious work, combined with regressive adjustment policies applied by most countries, many of which are returning to the orthodox neoliberal formulas of the 1980s. But what has undoubtedly had the greatest impact has been the wave of conservative politics that has swept the region in the last 3 years, after almost 15 years of progressive governments in several countries.

Whether it be through elections or institutional coups, via parliament and/or the judiciary, the Right has taken power in key countries of the region such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile and the United States, or has maintained its hegemony, in the case of Honduras, Colombia, Paraguay and Peru. This resurgence of the conservative right has been accompanied by reactionary, authoritarian and often fascist rhetoric, which has placed the region at a dangerous anti-democratic crossroads. Since his election in the United States, Donald Trump has been unrelenting in his attacks on migrants, women and all that represents diversity. The US has returned to an aggressive, interventionist and unilateralist stance that is threatening the peace in regions across the world. But Brazil is undoubtedly the most serious case. Since the re-election of President Dilma Rousseff at the end of 2014, a relentless offensive was waged to destabilise her government, leading to the parliamentary coup that ousted the elected president and then focused on attacking and excluding the Workers' Party (PT) and its leading political figure, former President Lula, from the institutional political game. Rigged trials, with no real right to a proper defence, combined with a media campaign bent on destroying his image, led to Lula's imprisonment and definitive exclusion from the 2018 elections, in which he was the clear favourite, and the imposition of a fascist right-wing formula that was threatening, as this report was completed, to take the presidency in the second round. The parliamentary, judicial and media coup was not only aimed at neutralising the aspirations of Lula, but at imposing a counter-reform of the labour law, a programme of economic and social adjustment, and facilitating the privatisation and sale of the country's main companies and assets.

The conservative governments are exploiting the crisis to impose their formulas. As in Brazil, the governments of Argentina, Chile and other countries are focussing their attacks on weakening or eliminating the gains secured by the working class in terms of labour rights and social security. Social organisations are also being criminalised and persecuted, trade union action is prosecuted in the courts, and the right to strike is prohibited or hindered, as in Argentina and Costa Rica. In Colombia, a peace agreement was finally signed in 2017 after a complex negotiation process; however, the political right, which won the 2018 elections, focussed its electoral campaign on attacking the agreement, as well as advocating greater fiscal adjustment. Colombia has seen a resurgence in the violence against trade unionists and social activists. Since 7 August 2018, when the new government took office, 24 social leaders have been murdered, in addition to the over 300 killed since the signing of the peace deal in 2017.

Throughout this period, the TUCA has worked with its affiliates to respond to this complex situation, defending its political vision regarding the need to maintain a trade union offensive against attacks by governments and employers, strengthening union solidarity and serving as a vehicle for the defence and strengthening of democracy. Active trade union solidarity was mobilised, with special emphasis on Brazil, Argentina and Colombia, where the attacks on trade unions have been the fiercest.

MILESTONES DURING THE 2014-2018 PERIOD

During this period, the TUCA organised more than 500 activities, including national, sub-regional and international events, attended by more than 10,000 people overall, including trade union members and leaders and representatives from other social organisations. Women trade unionists were well represented, accounting for approximately 40% of the total and young people also attended in growing numbers (between 15 and 20%). The Secretariat was deployed throughout the region, providing direct assistance to most of the affiliates and active support in several countries. Despite the economic crisis, which affected the resources of affiliates contributing alongside the TUCA, and the departure of some affiliates from the organisation in March 2016, the organisation continued to pursue its political initiative and strategic agenda adopted at the [2016 Congress](#). 2017 was a particularly complex year from a financial perspective, but administrative and organisational measures, enabling its recovery in 2018, were successfully adopted, consolidating the political action of the trade union movement in the Americas.



1. III TUCA CONGRESS STRENGTHENS ITS DRIVE FOR MORE DEMOCRACY, MORE RIGHTS AND MORE AND BETTER JOBS – [video](#)

The TUCA held its main policy event in March 2016, amid the political climate described above. The resolutions passed by the Congress served as the basis for the political and trade union initiatives prioritised by the TUCA for the 2016-2020 period.



The resolutions cover the range of issues set out under the four Strategic Action Priorities: Sustainable Development; Decent Work and Freedom of Association; Trade Union Organising and Self-Reform; and Peace, Democracy and Human Rights. The Congress also approved, by majority votes, motions in Support of Democracy in Brazil and against the Parliamentary Coup, a motion in Solidarity with President Dilma Rousseff, a motion in support of Peace in Colombia, a motion on the Neoliberal Policies of the current Argentine Government and a motion on Afro-descendant Peoples: Recognition, Justice and Development.

- PLADA IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY:** The implementation strategy of the Development Platform for the Americas (PLADA), launched in 2014, was maintained throughout the period, covering a range of key areas, such as **empowering affiliates**. The affiliates' capacities and knowledge about the PLADA were developed, enabling them to draw up advocacy strategies aimed at influencing development policies both nationally and regionally. Both face-to-face and virtual training activities were held, training and outreach materials were produced and their content was shared in a variety of forums (ILO, OAS, ECLAC) as well as at events with other non-union organisations.



- **Training strategy:** The ideas and principles set out in the PLADA were included in the union centres' national training plans; The TUCA (**TUCA-ECLAC Courses and Schools Network**) promoted both face-to-face and distance learning programmes about the PLADA, producing and distributing [PLADA manuals](#) on gender, young workers, and human rights.



2. **Linkages with the 2030 Agenda-SDGs:** The PLADA, as a reference for trade union analysis of the development approach for the region, has served as the basis for the trade union movement's approach to the 2030 Agenda and the sustainable development goals (SDGs). The PLADA serves as a basis for presenting arguments related to the SDGs and the associated targets at international trade union events or those attended by governments, international institutions and civil society. Materials (leaflets and brochures) were produced drawing parallels between the SDGs and the PLADA, as well as a video on the subject.

ALLIANCE BUILDING: The TUCA is continuing with its policy of building alliances between trade union and social movements. The "[Continental Platform for Democracy and Against Neoliberalism](#)" launched in 2015 in Havana and supported by several national and regional organisations, has succeeded in setting an example of the unity that can be achieved between the social movements in the region, against the background of the attacks on democracy and the rollback of rights. In November 2016, dozens of joint actions and mobilisations were held by its members together with a range of other social actors. The 2017 conference was focussed on the Continental Meeting in Montevideo in November, which brought together more than 5,000 activists and social leaders from all over the continent – including around 2,500 women – who gathered to reflect, share experiences and build joint agendas on the themes of the platform: confronting neoliberalism and multinationals, and defending democracy and the integration of peoples. As in previous years, in 2018, the platform pursued its agenda of forming a joint and united front at the various forums and events and is preparing to join other movements at the demonstrations against the G20 and the IMF in Buenos Aires at the end of November 2018.



3. DECENT WORK AND FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION:

The fight for decent work and freedom of association, one of the TUCA's four strategic priority areas, has been consolidated as one of the key components of trade union action in the region. Trade union organisations have been playing an increasingly active role in the reaction to attacks on freedom of association and collective bargaining, as well as other fundamental rights at work, both through the human and trade union rights network, linked to the ITUC, and the Continental Legal Team.



- **Committee on the Application of Standards (CAS, ILC):** Trade union participation in the CAS of the ILC was strong and well-coordinated, thanks to the preparatory process involving ITUC-TUCA affiliates and the Global Unions, which have developed a strong regional preparatory process. The proposed list for the CAS is discussed within this framework, as are the trade union positions presented within the other ILC committees, strengthening the positions defended by ITUC-TUCA in the sessions on individual cases in the Americas and the calls for the adoption of conclusions setting out clear and concrete recommendations regarding the steps governments should take to protect workers' rights. As part of the process, regional meetings are held with affiliates to assess the work of the CAS and to hone the strategy for participation in future CAS sessions and ILO supervisory mechanisms.
- **Inter-American Human Rights System:** The trade union movement has strengthened its role and capacity to influence the agenda of the Inter-American Human Rights System of the OAS, making contributions to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and its thematic hearings and identifying emblematic cases to be presented to the Inter-American Court. The hearings held at the IACHR include the hearing on freedom of association in Paraguay (April 2016), denouncing the intensification of anti-union persecution and repression in the country and the hearing on freedom of association in Mexico (December 2016), denouncing the persistent and widespread use of collective protection agreements that hinder the democratic and independent collective representation of workers. In October 2017, individual hearings were held on Brazil, over the negative impact of the labour reforms on human rights, and Argentina, over the criminalisation of union organising and the work carried out by labour lawyers. In October 2018, the hearing on "[Guarantees for Freedom of Expression, Association, and Peaceful Assembly for Trade Unions in the Americas](#)" was held, in which the cases of Brazil, Colombia, Argentina, Chile and Honduras were examined. The TUCA, together with affiliates in Colombia, Brazil and the US, presented their cases to the IACHR commissioners.



4. GENDER EQUALITY AND EQUITY



The TUCA Women's Committee of the Americas (CMTA) held **the first edition of the Women Workers of the Americas Conference** in September 2015 under the heading "Democracy, Women's Autonomy and Gender Equality". The event was attended by 200 women and marked a milestone for the trade union movement in the Americas by establishing a guide setting out the long-held aspirations for full equality and defending the right to a life with dignity for working women, defining the basic democratic criteria that should prevail within our organisations and a principle of justice that would lead us towards inclusive societies and organisations that respect diversity and have a vision of sustainable development that involves everyone equally.

A virtual training programme is available, aimed at empowering and developing the capacities of new leaders to advocate for a [sustainable development agenda with a trade union perspective](#).

Violence and harassment in the world of work: Coordinated and united action, including initiatives in preparation for the discussions at the 2018 ILC, especially within the framework of the CAS, as well as the debate and negotiations regarding a new standard on violence and harassment in the world of work, highlighting the role of our women leaders.



Climate justice and industrial transformation

The TUCA, in line with the resolutions of our third congress and the environmental pillar of the PLADA, focussed on the following priorities:

- Strengthening its advocacy work to shape national and regional development policies. Over the last four years, we have been pursuing concrete trade union action aimed at promoting a new economic model that is socially and environmentally sustainable, contributing to a new paradigm for sustainable development.
- Following and engaging in the negotiation processes related to climate change. We have strengthened the strategy of building alliances and working in unison with other organisations and social movements, reinforcing trade unions' bargaining power within the United Nations.
- We are also actively involved in the process of negotiating and implementing the 2030 Development Agenda at national, regional and global levels. Aware of the strengths but also the weaknesses and shortcomings of the SDGs, we reaffirm the principles set out in the PLADA, as a tool for promoting trade union proposals geared towards a new development model. The PLADA offers a body of proposals that have been shaped by the cumulation of social struggles and debates, and that have served as the foundation for shaping an overarching vision of development.



- We are developing a more systematic approach to the issue of energy democratization, as well as a regional vision of the concept of a just transition. The [third TUCA regional conference on energy, environment and labour](#) has contributed to the development of a trade union strategy pursuing an energy system that works in the public interest and resists the privatisation of public goods and energy resources.
- We are also working on systematising a regional vision of the concept and processes behind a just transition, taking into account both the particularities and diversity of the world of work and the various forms of collective organisation within it.

Taming Corporate Power in Supply Chains

In accordance with the Strategic Plan approved in October 2016, a range of national and regional activities were organised, involving various social movements, the TUCA and Global Unions, to assess the impact of multinationals in the region. The TUCA also joined the Global Campaign for a Binding Treaty on Business and Human Rights. These initiatives have contributed to reaffirming the TUCA's policy on tackling multinationals and their production strategies through [Global Supply Chains](#), confirming the need for a holistic approach (training, organising, legal and advocacy work) to the action taken by trade union centres and the TUCA, working in coordination and partnership with the ITUC, through the "[End Corporate Greed](#)" Campaign, as well as with the Global Unions. The need for alliance building with social movements, to promote united action, was also reconfirmed. Two fundamental arenas for such united action are the Continental Platform for Democracy and against Neoliberalism and the Campaign for a Binding Treaty on Business and Human Rights.



Project with DGB- Bildungswerk on value chains: The project was launched in February 2017 with the aim of assisting trade union centres in Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, El Salvador and Panama to develop strategies to defend the rights of workers in supply chains. The strategy is to boost the work being done within the framework of the "End Corporate Greed" campaign coordinated by the ITUC. So far, diagnosis and research activities have been carried out in each country as well as [a basic distance learning course on Global Supply Chains and Trade Union Action](#), and two regional meetings have been held. The main outcome has been the strengthening of trade union action in the region to deal with multinational companies and global production chains. This

has been achieved through a range of training, organising and awareness-raising initiatives, and the establishment of a roadmap linking up with other areas and programmes developed by the TUCA and its affiliates in the five countries taking part in the project.

With regard to the objective of linking trade unions to the Campaign for a Binding Treaty on Business and Human Rights, the TUCA took part in the second and third sessions of the Open-Ended Intergovernmental Working Group on Transnational Corporations and Other Business Enterprises with Respect to Human Rights, held in Geneva. During the second session, in 2016, the TUCA presented the region's perspective on this issue to official institutions and civil society movements. During the third session, in 2017, the TUCA was able to coordinate with the ITUC and other Global Unions to include the unions' positions in the Elements Document prepared by the government of Ecuador, which chairs the Working Group. Several initiatives and actions were also coordinated with the organisations taking part in the Global Campaign for a Binding Treaty. For the 2018 session, preparations were made for a stronger trade union presence, having debated different strategies and analysed the "Zero Draft" submitted for consideration by the chair of the Group, to be discussed in the fourth session.

Eradicating slavery

Forced labour: The TUCA's strategy and action plan for eradicating forced labour was strengthened through a [continental meeting](#) in July 2017 in Buenos Aires, at which more in-depth discussions were held on forced labour at global, regional and national levels and the ITUC campaign for the ratification of the 2014 Protocol to the ILO Convention on forced labour was presented. Permanent monitoring is carried out, in conjunction with the affiliates, to identify progress and setbacks in terms of policies to combat forced labour or contemporary forms of slavery, such as human trafficking, sexual exploitation or the worst forms of child labour. The strategy and action plan have been expanded to include links with the targets set out in the ITUC's Frontline campaign "Eliminating Slavery" as well as Sustainable Development Goal 8.7 and the challenges raised by global production chains. Support was given to the work carried out by Paraguayan trade union centres in the Chaco region, aimed at identifying instances of forced labour, as well as promoting human rights and the organising of workers.



- Eradicating child labour:** The TUCA has been working to strengthen the Continental Network to Combat Child Labour in terms of its organisation and impact, which includes a communication component ([social media](#)). The TUCA and its affiliates, in coordination with the ITUC, played an active role in the process of preparing and contributing to the [IV Global Conference on the Sustained Eradication of Child Labour](#), held in Buenos Aires, on 14-16 November 2017. This preparatory work succeeded in ensuring strong, coordinated and united participation, increasing our impact on the debate and results of the IV Conference. During the second half of 2016 and the first half of 2017, sub-regional trade union preparatory activities were carried out in the Southern Cone, the Andean Region, Central America, Mexico and the Caribbean. A tripartite regional meeting, attended by affiliated unions, sister organisations and international trade union federations, was also held. Trade union participation in the [Regional Initiative for a Latin America and Caribbean Free of Child Labour](#) was also followed up on. The trade union strategy has also been linked to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with special emphasis on reaching target 8.7 of the SDGs. Two documents were published, a book on *Perspectives and Actions of the Trade Union Movements of the Americas regarding Child Labour* and a pamphlet on "Trade Unionism in the Americas and the Fight against Child Labour", serving as guides for the trade union contributions to the IV Conference in 2017 and future activities.



Countries at risk

Guatemala: Constant follow-up was given to the “[Decent Work, Decent Life Campaign](#)” during the four-year period. Support was provided to affiliated organisations submitting complaints to the ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Standards regarding the Guatemalan state’s lack of political will to tackle the systematic impunity and the widespread violations of trade union and labour rights, in breach of the Road Map signed by the government and the ILO. Support was also provided for training, advocacy and joint initiatives led by affiliated organisations and Global Unions to strengthen national and international action capabilities.

Haiti: The TUCA, moving forward with the international solidarity campaign to strengthen the Haitian trade union movement, continued to support trade union cooperation with Haiti, with a view to promoting the right to organise, social protection, gender equality and trade union unity in the country. In 2017, a video was produced in Spanish, English, French and Portuguese to present the contributions made by international cooperation to the process of strengthening trade unionism in Haiti. In 2018, the TUCA, in coordination with the ITUC and ACTRAV, carried out a mission to follow up on the Better Work Haiti Programme, focussed on the operations of the textile companies taking part in the initiative. The mission identified widespread violations of freedom of association and systematic anti-union practices within the companies in the sector. The dispute mediation mechanisms and the role played by (practically non-existent) public bodies are extremely weak. In addition, employers obstruct the recognition of the legitimate, representative trade unions that should be present in the bodies set up for social dialogue. The Mission made a series of recommendations, in consultation with the trade union centres, which the Better Work programme and the ILO need to take on board to improve on the programme’s effectiveness.

Global coherence and development

Trade Union Development Cooperation Network: Strengthening the Network’s impact on development and cooperation policies especially the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, through direct links with ECLAC, which is to coordinate the monitoring of the SDGs in the Americas. The main areas of work include:

- Studies/analysis of development policies at national and regional level;
- Capacity building and enhancing the participation of TUCA affiliates in global debates on development;
- Presenting PLADA to governments, multilateral and international organisations, political parties and other social actors;
- **National workshops** on specific elements of the PLADA, linking them to the sustainable development goals (SDGs), potentially with technical support from ECLAC, and with the participation of members of the TUCA Development Cooperation Network (TUDCN-TUCA) and the Working Group on Hemispheric Development and Integration (GTDIH).
- **Production of the document “[Comparative Political Perspectives – the PLADA and the 2030 Agenda](#)”,** comparing and contrasting the 2030 Agenda and the agreements set out in the PLADA.



- Social protection:** The TUCA consolidated its agenda for the defence of universal social protection at national and regional levels. During 2017 and 2018, national activities have been carried out in five countries of the region to strengthen the proposal-making and advocacy capacities of affiliated trade union centres in the area of social protection. Studies were conducted on fiscal policies, social protection floors and the care economy in those countries. Two regional meetings were held. The first was aimed at advancing trade union action to guarantee the right to social protection for migrant workers in the Americas, through multilateral agreements such as the Mercosur Multilateral Agreement on Social Security or the Ibero-American Agreement on Social Security. The second regional meeting looked at social protection and the fiscal reforms taking place in the region, with a view to analysing the context and drawing up a trade union action strategy aimed at resisting regressive reforms and advocating reforms that guarantee more rights and better cover. The TUCA is taking part in alliances pressing for compliance with the SDGs, such as the Social Protection, Freedom and Justice for Workers Initiative promoting target 1.3 and the Global Deal initiative on social dialogue and decent work.



Global governance of migration

The TUCA's Working Group on Migration has strengthened cooperation between affiliates through the Continental WG as well as within the Southern Cone, Andean Countries and Central America. We have involved affiliated and sister organisations from Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay, Chile, Peru, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama in developing the migration agenda. We have also worked to encourage more active involvement of affiliates in the United States and Canada, two of the world's largest recipients of migrants. The holding of workshops and seminars is supported by DGB Bildungswerk and ILO-Actrav. The work carried out has led affiliates to sign bilateral and multilateral agreements on trade union, political and technical cooperation. In Brazil, social organisations directly involved in the process of drafting the new migration law consulted the TUCA and its affiliates as references from the world of work. The WG also provided key support to affiliates taking part in the Committee for Labour Migration at the 106 International Labour Conference. Its technical coordinator and three other members took part in the ILC and, prior to the conference, the group drew up a document that served as an input for the participation of the trade unionists from the region. The TUCA represented workers at the regional consultation on the [Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration](#), held by ECLAC in Chile, as well as in the last round of negotiations on the Global Compact at the UN in July 2017.



Count Us In!

Training for women on empowerment and advocacy was reinforced, strengthening leadership among women trade unionists, to promote activities designed to ensure progress in the application of international conventions and agreements on equal rights and opportunities for men and women in the world of work. Progress was made in analysing the state of social protection cover (in terms of the opportunities and challenges for the trade union movement, with special emphasis on women). Based on the findings, conclusions were drawn up regarding the strategy to be promoted by the TUCA, in line with priorities set out in the CMTA/TUCA action plan, such as the issue of gender-based violence and the care economy, to ensure the development of strategies to influence policy at national and regional level.

Training and leadership initiatives with a gender and youth perspective were reinforced through organising and recruitment campaigns and programmes, linked to the debate on the challenges surrounding the Future of Work.

Domestic workers



The [domestic work campaign](#), “[Work like no other, rights like any other](#)”, continues to promote advocacy strategies to press for the ratification and implementation of C189. The Convention has been ratified in 14 countries, Peru being the latest, following up on the achievements of the “12X12” Campaign and the joint action plan with the International Domestic Workers Federation to organise and build the capacities of the domestic workers in the region.

Organising

Organising and trade union self-reform: As part of the TUCA’s organising and trade union self-reform programme over the last four years, the Global Organising Academy for the Americas has developed the capacities of hundreds of workers from its affiliated organisations in El Salvador, Dominican Republic, Brazil, Chile, Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, Costa Rica and Guatemala. It also held dozens of national workshops to train lead organisers, and four regional organising academies, one in Chile, another in Panama and two in Brazil. In addition, the TUCA coordinated the participation of the delegations from the Americas attending the three ITUC Global Organising Conferences held in Belgium, Italy and Canada. All the content covered has led to the formulation of national, regional and sector-wide action plans that have in turn led to collective bargaining negotiations, improvements in working conditions, and the prioritisation of organising and recruitment campaigns, bringing thousands of new union members into our affiliated organisations.

