

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY REPORT 2014-2015

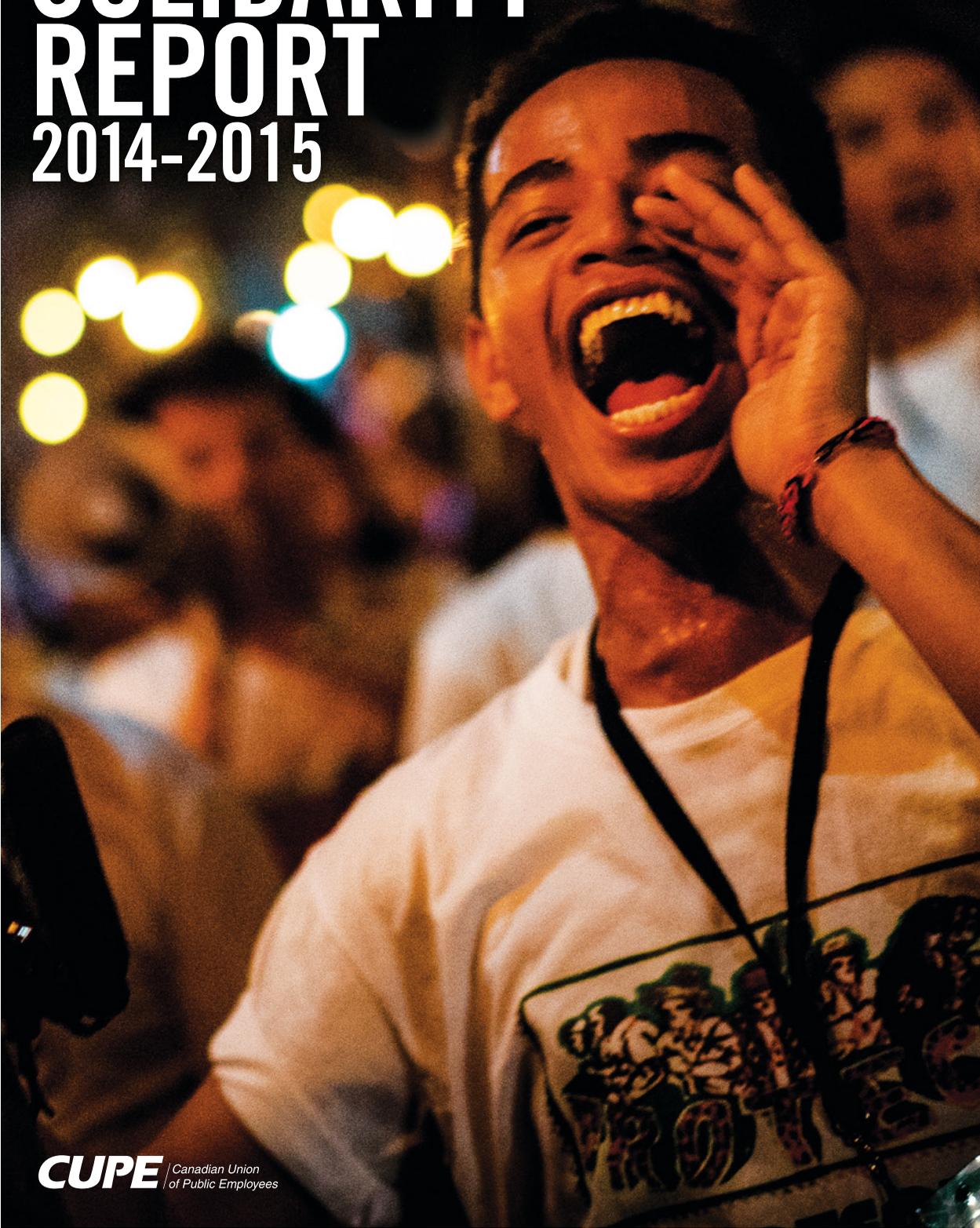


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INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY – A YEAR IN REVIEW

Throughout our history, CUPE has developed and sustained partnerships and relationships with unions and social movements around the world. We have drawn inspiration and lessons from the experiences of others in struggles; whether its solidarity with migrant Mexican and Filipino workers in California who launched a five year boycott and strike action against grape growers in the 1960's, the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s, or the Colombian water workers union fighting for the right to water in 2015. Our solidarity knows no borders.

In 2014 CUPE assessed our international solidarity work and adapted it to our changing world. We drew lessons from the campaigns and struggles of our sisters and brothers around the world, and developed an international policy that supports strengthening our relations and actions in solidarity with these struggles.

Our 2015 International Solidarity Report provides an overview of our work with our partner groups in Central America, Burma, the Philippines and Colombia. There are updates on our work as members of the Public Services International, our human rights work and our participation in United Nations and International Labour Organization events. The centre spread gives you a graphic illustration of the global reach of CUPE's work and the final chapter outlines the range of international issues that have direct impact on our bargaining here in Canada.

International solidarity can inform our strategies at the bargaining table, as well as against privatization and austerity programs, because all workers experience the impact of a global economic system that puts profit over people; no matter where in the world we live. The popular refrain act locally, think globally is rooted in the reality that we are all connected as workers.

Strong movements are emerging to fend off privatization and maintain public services, defend human rights, and promote climate justice. These efforts are being countered on a variety of fronts including: legislation such as Canada's proposed Bill C-51; international trade and investment agreements; and unjust migrant and temporary foreign worker programs. Conservative forces want to use fear as a baton to silence unions and other groups working for change. They want to undermine our solidarity and our collective power.

Today we support worker to worker, union to union solidarity in Colombia, Nicaragua, Honduras, Cuba and the Philippines because we believe we have a great deal to learn from workers and unions around the world. It is through exchanges and building relationships that we create a just world that serves the interests of the majority of the worlds' people.



Paul MacIsaac.



Charles Fleming.



INTERNATIONAL MEETINGS AND EVENTS

◀ **UNION WOMEN PROTEST THE SILENCING OF WOMEN IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN FRONT OF THE UN COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN.**

UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

2015 marks the 20-year review of the Beijing Platform on Women's Equality and Human Rights. CUPE and women trade unionists from all over the world attended the meeting of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in New York City in March as part of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) delegation.

Delegates challenged the United Nations Commission decision to partner with the Uber Corporation. Uber is an American International company that develops, markets and operates a mobile app-based transportation network. It announced a strategic partnership with the goal of accelerating economic opportunity for women. Uber pledged to create one million jobs for women as drivers by 2020.

The trade union delegation united around a shared concern that the creation of one million precarious, informal jobs at Uber would not contribute to women's economic empowerment. This partnership represents exactly the type of structural inequality within the labour market that women have been fighting for decades. Women need good stable jobs, decent wages and benefits.

Following the intervention by union delegates, the broader gathering of

UN women reconsidered the partnership and announced that they had cancelled the agreement.

Both Sheryl Burns, Co-Chair National Women's Committee and Elizabeth Dandy, CUPE Equality Director attended on behalf of CUPE.

TRADE SUMMIT

During a meeting organized in September 2014, by the Public Services International (PSI) unions and trade justice groups met to discuss the danger of ongoing multinational trade negotiations to the public sector and democracy.

The PSI along with the Our World is not for Sale network released *The really good friends of transnational corporations agreements* a report about the Trade in Services Agreement (TISA). The report talks about the regulatory system behind TISA and how it aims to impose irreversible deregulation in various sectors, from health care to education, from financial services to data and communication.

SYMPOSIUM ON QUALITY PUBLIC SERVICES AND THE ROLE OF TRADE UNIONS -- JAPANESE TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (RENGO)

The Japanese Trade Union Confederation asked the Canadian Labour Congress to send a representative to participate in a

symposium in Tokyo in February 2015. The Congress contacted CUPE to see if we could send one of our specialists to discuss the role of trade unions in delivering quality public services. Japanese unions wanted to exchange information and experiences about how to ensure international labour standards are applied to public employees and to discuss the role of unions in providing quality public services.

CUPE Researcher Keith Reynolds attended the meeting and reported on the state of the public sector in Canada, and discussed the role of unions in protecting public services. He underlined Canadian unions' work to protect public services in the face of cuts and privatization.

The Japanese Trade Union Confederation (RENGO) was created in 1989 as a labour central uniting the public and private sector unions. RENGO represents 6.75 million workers in Japan, approximately 12 per cent of Japanese workers. More than 80 per cent of Japanese workers are not unionized.

RENGO's five point vision for a "secure society based on work" includes lifelong learning, a new child care system, job introduction services, vocational training for unemployed workers and support for the elderly.

WORLD PRIDE 2014

Toronto hosted the World Pride and Human Rights Conference in July 2014. This was the first ever World Pride held in North America and the fourth such festival in the world.

The conference brought together more than 400 activists, educators, researchers, and policy-makers from over 50 countries around the world. Participants shared experiences, celebrated gains, took stock of the struggles ahead and discussed strategies for change at the local, regional, national and global levels.

CUPE's delegation included National Pink Triangle Committee members Julie Van Tassell (CUPE 3885, Nova Scotia), Lorenzo Dufrane (CUPE 998, Manitoba) and Audrey Gauthier (CUPE 4041, Quebec), transsexual/transgender representative, and Wendy Johnston CUPE equality representative from the Maritimes.

Conference highlights included presentations on the effects of colonization on two-spirited people in Canada and two-spirited youth activism. Two spirited is an expression used to describe a native person who identifies as gay, lesbian, or transgender. Other highlights of the conference included:

the power of boycotts and grass-roots organizing in the hotel sector; the international fight against HIV criminalization; the situation of LGBT refugees in Canada; aging; health care and social needs; the role of Pride parades in global advocacy; asexuality in sexual education; and trans rights in Asian countries.

The 10-day global celebration in Toronto culminated in a massive World Pride parade.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONGRESS (ITUC)

At first glance trade union engagement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) seems implausible. And with good reason. However through bi-annual meetings and ongoing efforts by the International Trade Union Congress (ITUC) and Global Union Federations (GUFs) there has been a slight shift in attitude on some key issues of fiscal policy, equality, and the importance of public services.

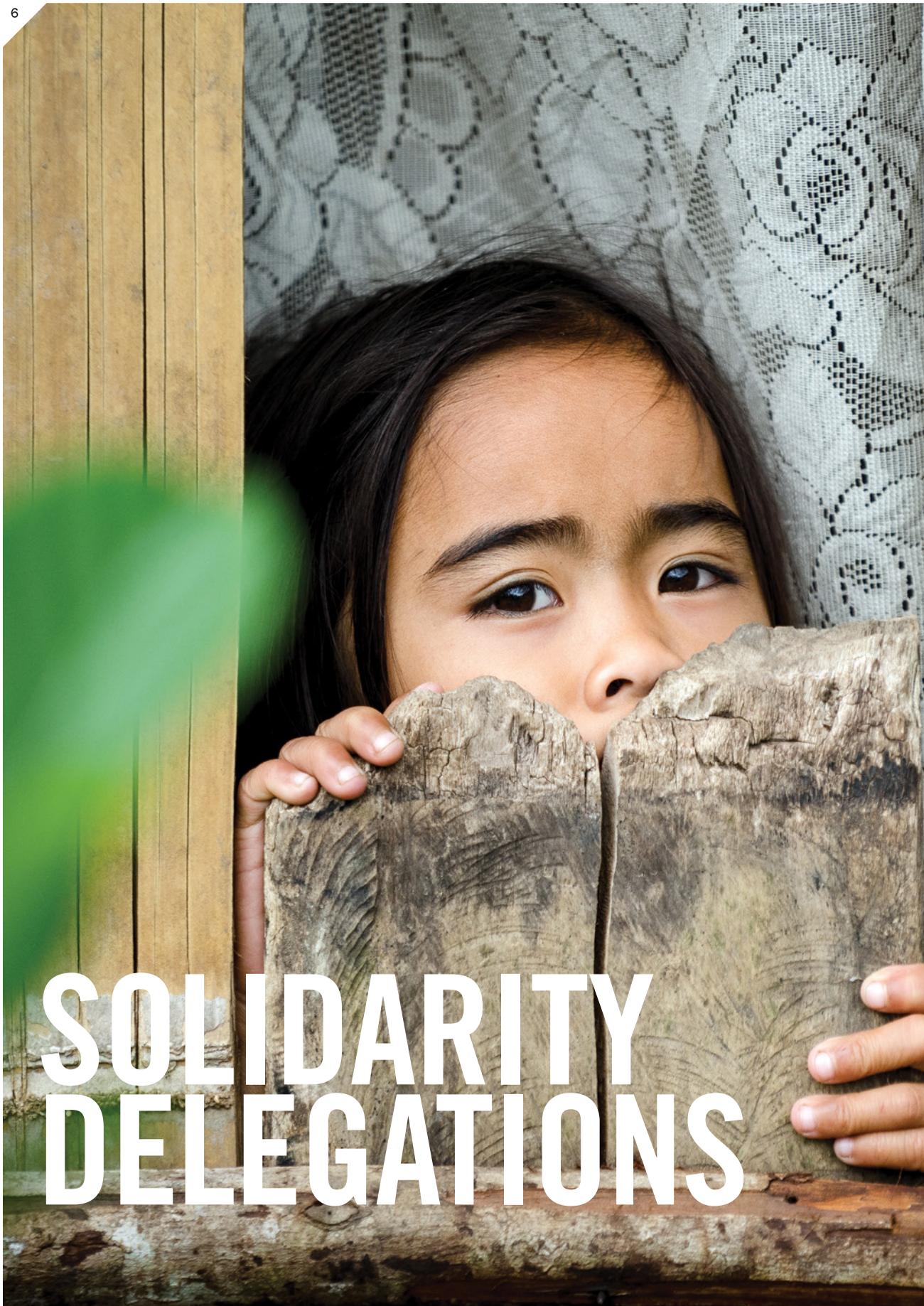
CUPE attended the bi-annual high-level meetings of the International Trade Union Congress (ITUC) and Global Union Federations (GUFs) with the IMF and WB officials in February 2015 as part of the

Public Services International (PSI) delegation.

Dialogue has led to recent research and statements from the IMF and WB about the negative economic repercussions of increased inequality, on the necessity of public investment and wage-led growth and appreciation for the positive role of trade unions, minimum wages and labour standards represent a broadening of perspective for these influential organizations.

Despite these statements, major and fundamental differences remain on key issues - but occasionally the efforts bear fruit, or at least a less bitter harvest.





SOLIDARITY DELEGATIONS



▲
KAIROS LEARNING TOUR
◀ PHILIPPINES

KAIROS LEARNING TOUR PHILIPPINES

In response to an appeal from Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in Zamboanga del Sur in southern Philippines, CUPE participated in a Philippines Learning Tour to the region in July 2014. CUPE 3550 member and NEB Alternate Diversity Vice President (Aboriginal) Gloria Lepine joined the Canadian delegation to visit with Indigenous and non-Indigenous mining affected communities. The Canadian mine TVI Pacific is operating in the region.

The delegation called on the Philippine government and the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples to be

accountable for mining laws and policies that leave the environment vulnerable to massive plunder and irreversible destruction. They also called on the Canadian government to ensure that Canadian companies operating overseas act in a way that respects and upholds human rights and does not damage the environment.

The Learning Tour was coordinated by KAIROS a social justice organization of eleven churches and religious organizations, in partnership with a Philippine delegation of church workers, missionaries, Indigenous people and students coming from the region. Mining Watch Canada, and Idle No More also participated in the tour.



WATER CARAVAN TO DETROIT

One thousand litres of public water were greeted with cheers in Detroit in July 2014, where over 120,000 citizens were locked in a water and human rights crisis.

CUPE National President Paul Moist joined Council of Canadians National Chairperson Maude Barlow in a convoy from Windsor to Detroit to deliver water as a show of support and solidarity with the people of Detroit who had their water cut-off.

The Detroit Water and Sewage Department started cutting off water in April to residents behind in payment of their bills. This affected over 15,000 homes. The financially troubled city has declared bankruptcy, and many have fled for the suburbs or other cities, greatly diminishing the tax-base and leaving much of the public infrastructure – such as the water and wastewater system – in disrepair. Those who have remained in Detroit, mostly African-American and low-income earners, have seen utility rates rise over 119 per cent in the last decade.

SOLIDARITY WITH OUR AMERICAN FRIENDS

CUPE National President Paul Moist brought greetings to our American sister union, AFSCME, at its convention in July 2014. AFSCME is the largest AFL-CIO affiliated union, representing over 1.6 million public sector workers across the US. Over 3,000 delegates gathered in Chicago for the convention. AFSCME and CUPE have been sharing information and working together on member engagement, pension issues and fighting privatization.

**PEACE IN THE
REGION CANNOT BE
ACHIEVED UNLESS
THERE IS AN END TO
ALL AGGRESSION ON
BOTH SIDES, AN END
TO THE BLOCKADE
AGAINST GAZA AND AN
END TO THE ILLEGAL
OCCUPATIONS OF
THE PALESTINIAN
TERRITORIES BY
ISRAEL.**

**RECOGNITION OF HUMAN
RIGHTS AND INTERNATIONAL
HUMANITARIAN LAW IN GAZA**

In August 2014, the world watched in horror as violence and destruction left nearly 1,900 people in Palestine and 67 people in Israel dead. Ban Ki-moon, secretary-general of the UN, said, “the massive deaths and destruction in Gaza have shocked and shamed the world.”

CUPE called on the Canadian government to recognize the need for human rights and international law to be respected and to call for an end to the unjust and disproportionate violence inflicted on the people of Gaza by Israel.

CUPE joined workers around the world in providing urgent humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza through the humanitarian relief initiative launched by the International Transport Workers’ Federation and supported by the International Trade Union Confederation.

Civilians in Gaza were wounded and killed while under occupation and siege. While under bombardment, people were trapped without safe refuge, and without access to lifesaving support such as medical supplies, electricity and clean water.

CUPE’s position is that peace in the region cannot be achieved unless there is an end to all aggression on both sides, an end to the blockade against Gaza and an end

to the illegal occupations of the Palestinian territories by Israel.

EBOLA

The World Health Organization (WHO) says that despite a significant drop in the numbers of people currently being infected, the outbreak of the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) continued to be a global emergency in 2015.

This outbreak revealed the structural and systemic weaknesses of the health systems of Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia. Investment in the public sector health system over the past few decades, particularly following the civil conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone, would have dramatically reduced the consequences of this outbreak. Hundreds of lives could have been saved. Addressing the structural and long-term political problems such as the lack of funding for the public sector health system, the lack of decent working conditions and labour rights, inadequate universal health coverage are the focus of the local and global trade union movement.

CUPE supports the PSI Ebola Virus Disease Trade Union Intervention Strategy to address the need to lobby for proper staffing and training of health workers in West Africa, to campaign for better health and safety conditions for workers and to promote the rebuilding and extension of public health systems throughout the region.



**DOMESTIC AND
INTERNATIONAL
POLICIES
THAT IMPACT
BARGAINING**

BILL C-51 THREATENS THE CIVIL LIBERTIES AND DEMOCRATIC FREEDOMS OF ALL PEOPLE LIVING IN CANADA. THIS BILL WILL CRIMINALIZE THE ACTIONS OF THOSE WHO EXERCISE THEIR FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT TO PROTEST, AND/OR WHOSE VIEWS ARE IN OPPOSITION TO THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC PLANS OF THE GOVERNMENT IN POWER.

BILL C-51

CUPE has joined a growing list of Canadians who think Bill C-51 goes too far. The union has grave concerns over the impact the proposed changes to the Criminal Code, law enforcement, and the expansion of the government's intelligence gathering powers will have on our right to due process, free speech and privacy protection.

Four former prime ministers are concerned with the bill's broad measures; the Privacy Commissioner — an officer of Parliament — lacks the power and resources to provide oversight of C-51; and Canada's reputation is being tarnished as international media report the Conservative bill could open the door to human rights abuses.

The provisions of Bill C-51 are unfortunately not unique in the world. In the wake of 9/11, the so called "war on terror" has been used as a pretext for legislation to justify the detention of leaders and activists from indigenous, farming and peasant communities, or environmental, human rights, church based and trade union movements.

CUPE and other groups are concerned that threats to 'national security' could include trade

unionists who engage in strike action, indigenous leaders who act to protect their right to self determination, environmental activists working to protect our land and resources, racialized communities who expose racial profiling and police violence, migrant workers who try to gain access to immigration status and poor communities who express their right to access public services and economic justice.

All of us may be vulnerable to unjust surveillance and criminalization in the proposed Bill C-51. CUPE and the NDP opposition have been actively opposing the bill with letters and petitions to Members of Parliament, rallies, door to door canvassing and other activities to oppose the bill.

Bill C-51 appears to be less about fighting actual terrorism and more about creating a culture of fear. Our opposition to this bill requires us to strengthen our communities and our relationships of solidarity with workers and our allies around the world.

In early spring the House of Commons adopted Bill C-51.



GLOBAL JUSTICE IN ACTION 2014-2015

CANADA

Letter to the Hon. Dr. K. Kellie Leitch regarding support for the ILO Convention 87, the Right to Strike and the International Court of Justice

Letter to the Hon. Chris Alexander expressing our concern regarding the case of Deepan Budlakoti in Canada

Letter to Prime Minister Stephen Harper regarding the need for increased financial contributions to frontline workers involved in West Africa Ebola outbreak

USA

Advocating Letter to concern to His Excellency Ban Ki-moon United Nations Secretary-General United Nations Secretariat regarding the appointment of a High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations

Letter to Barack Obama, President of the United States of America, regarding the release of the "Cuban 5"

Project: Advocating for more urgent and effective global responses to HIV and AIDS

MEXICO

Solidarity message to families of 43 murdered Mexican students

CUBA

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

HONDURAS

Project: Empowering women maquila workers – strengthening the Central American Network

Project: Empowering women maquila workers in occupational health and safety

NICARAGUA

Project: Taking action to defend the labour and gender rights of women maquila workers

COLOMBIA

Message of Solidarity to the Union of Workers of ACUAVALLE (SINTRACUAVALLE)

Project: Global defence of human rights to build policies for a transformative, holistic and participatory peace in the Southwest of Colombia

Project: Community support against the privatization of water



Letter of concern to Hon. John Baird regarding the SINTRAEMCALI Colombia Union Office Bombing in Cali

PERU

Letter of concern to Dr. Freddy Otarola Peñaranda, Ministro de Trabajo y Promocion del Empleo regarding actions of Peruvian Government in advance of 2014 COP20

NIGERIA

Letter of concern to the Hon. John Baird regarding the abduction of hundreds of school girls from the Government Girls Secondary School in Chibok

GAZA

Letter of concern to Prime Minister Stephen Harper regarding escalating conflict and disproportion violence between Israel and Gaza

BANGLADESH

Letter to Hon. Ed Fast and Hon. Christian Paradis regarding the Rana Plaza Donors' Trust Fund

Project: Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity (BCWS) to strengthen workers voices, improve working conditions and increase the role of unions in the garment sector

MYANMAR (BURMA)

Project: Building the capacity of human rights defenders in Burma

PHILIPPINES

Project: Worker to worker solidarity with the Alliance of Concerned Teachers to build grassroots unionism in the education sector.

Project: Defending human rights in the Philippines: A worker to worker solidarity project with COURAGE

SOUTH KOREA

Message of solidarity to the Korean Federation of Public Services and Transportation Workers' Union (KPTU) 2015 Congress

JAPAN

Letter to Hon. John Baird regarding the inclusion of the risks faced by workers in the policy document to be adopted at the UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction

CUPE CONTINUES TO CHALLENGE THE FREE TRADE AGENDA

TRADE IN SERVICES AGREEMENT (TISA)

The Trade in Services Agreement (TISA) is a dramatic threat to public services in Canada and around the world. TISA is a massive trade deal that aims to encourage privatization of public health care, broadcasting, water, transport and other services. As with most trade and investment agreements, TISA treats public services as commodities to be bought and sold in an attempt to favour the profits of the richest corporations and countries in the world over those who have the greatest needs.

The deal if passed could make it impossible for future governments to restore public services to public control, even in cases where private service delivery has failed. It would also restrict a government's ability to regulate key sectors including financial, energy, telecommunications and cross-border data flows.

The proposed agreement is the direct result of systematic advocacy by transnational corporations in banking, energy, insurance, telecommunications, transportation, and water sectors. CUPE continues to challenge the free trade agenda with Public Service International (PSI), the Trade Justice Network, and Common Frontiers.

Negotiations for TISA began in 2013 and are ongoing. The proponents of TISA also known as the "Really Good Friends of Services" currently include Australia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Hong Kong, Iceland, Israel, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, Panama, Pakistan, Peru, South Korea, Switzerland, Taiwan, Turkey, the United States, and the 28 member states of the European Union.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

As the UN millennium development goals (MDG) expire at the end of 2015, the international community is gearing up to agree to a new set of global targets and goals to end poverty and realize global justice. The Post 2015 Development Framework is now being negotiated by UN member states, civil society and the private sector and a new set of goals and targets, referred to as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), have now been identified.

The millennium development goals are eight international development goals that were established at a UN Summit in 2000. The goals are intended to support developing countries to achieve eradication of poverty and extreme hunger, universal primary education, gender equality and women's empowerment, reduction in child mortality, improve maternal health, combat HIV/AIDS, environmental sustainability, and the development of global partnerships for development.

Civil society organizations have argued, the good intentions of the sustainable development goals will not be achieved unless the new goals aim to redistribute wealth, decrease the power of transnational corporations, stop the privatization of public services, end the proliferation of trade and investment agreements, or regulate financial institutions.

The trade union movement and civil society groups are concerned about the prominent role given to the private sector in these negotiations. While these new development goals are being negotiated there is a parallel process underway to determine how they will be implemented and financed. It is in the latter process where activists are questioning whether the Post 2015 Development Framework is about expanding and strengthening the millennium development goals or whether it is an agenda aimed at the expansion of corporate power in the guise of promoting sustainability and addressing the needs of the poor.

As an affiliate of the CLC, a member of the Canadian Council for International Cooperation and in consultation with the ITUC and PSI, CUPE is tracking and engaging the Canadian government in these negotiations and supporting a people's agenda that includes rights recognition, justice, decent work, social protection, and public services.



▲ KAIROS LEARNING TOUR
PHILIPPINES

IMMIGRATION NOT DEPORTATION

On April 1, 2015, the majority of low-waged migrant workers employed under the Temporary Foreign Workers Program, who have worked in Canada for more than four years, were barred from continuing to work in Canada and forced to leave. Those forced to leave were also barred from returning to Canada as workers for another four years (referred to as the 4 & 4 rule). Workers who chose to stay became undocumented workers, forced “underground” and into the informal economy.

CUPE’s National Executive Board passed a resolution in solidarity with migrant workers who were affected by reforms to the Temporary Foreign Workers Program and Live-In Caregiver Program in 2014. We endorsed the

campaign of migrant advocates in advance of the April 1 deadline and echo their demands to end the 4 & 4 rule and grant migrant workers permanent residency with access to social benefits and entitlements.

Globally, there are over 200 million migrant workers who have left their homes and families in search of work in others countries. Every year they send \$400 billion (USD) back to their home countries. Forced to leave because of the conditions of chronic under-employment and unemployment, migrant workers have paid tens of thousands of dollars to come to Canada to work in minimum wage jobs to provide a better life for their families.

Many countries are implementing labour export policies to secure a constant flow of foreign currency and to prop up failing economies.

Receiving countries such as Canada have established temporary foreign worker programs to take advantage of growing poverty worldwide in the interest of employers here.

The 4 & 4 rule, imposed by Citizenship and Immigration Canada and enforced by Canadian Border Services Agency, are tearing apart families, friends and communities across the country.

Canada needs a robust immigration program where foreign workers have access to permanent residency upon arrival. All workers in this country need access to skills training and apprenticeships, a living wage, income security and access to public services.



PARTNER PROJECTS

▲ MARGARITA IS A MEMBER OF THE HONDURAN WOMEN'S COLLECTIVE (CODEMUH)

A BIG PORTION OF CUPE'S INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY WORK IS CARRIED OUT IN CONJUNCTION WITH OUR GLOBAL PARTNERS. OUR GLOBAL JUSTICE FUND SUPPORTS VARIOUS GROUPS AND THEIR PROJECTS AROUND THE GLOBE.

AIDS FREE WORLD

AIDS-Free World is an international advocacy organization with a small staff that works virtually from a dozen locations in the US and Canada, Africa, the Caribbean and Europe. AIDS-Free World continued to pursue controversial issues and causes over the course of the last year in pursuit of the all-encompassing priority of gender equality. They have launched a campaign to end immunity for sexual violence committed by United Nations Peacekeepers and also initiated a challenge to the way in which the International Labour Organization views child marriage.

It is not widely known that a 1946 UN Convention on Privileges and Immunities effectively grants immunity for sexual exploitation and abuse on large numbers of peacekeepers that report to the Secretary-General. AIDS-Free World is working to remove that immunity from the Convention.

ILO child labour statistics show that in the age group, 15 to 18, it emerged that 81 per cent of children involved in child labour were boys. Only 19 per cent were girls. This made no sense until they realized that missing entirely from the child labour numbers were girls trapped in child marriage; 15 million girls every year under the age of eighteen. AIDS-Free World believes that the circumstances of a young girl's life imprisoned in an illegal child marriage is equivalent

to the worst forms of child labour. They are now intent on persuading the ILO to count child marriage in the child labour statistics.

COLOMBIA – NOMADESC

CUPE's project partner NOMADESC works on global defence of human rights to build policies for a transformative, holistic and participatory peace in the southwest of Colombia.

Although the peace negotiations between the Government of Colombia and the FARC (The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) are underway, Colombia's internal armed conflict continues to result in serious abuses by irregular armed groups, including guerrillas and successor groups to paramilitaries. Human rights defenders, trade unionists, journalists, indigenous and Afro-Colombian leaders, continue to receive death threats and face abuse. Attacks, as well as the misuse of the legal system to bring sometimes bogus charges against human rights defenders and the theft of sensitive information from NGO offices continues to undermine the work of human rights organizations.

One area of particular concern over the past year is the growing violence against Afro-descendent communities in Buenaventura, a pacific coast port city in Valle de Cauca, which is considered the most dangerous city in Colombia.



CUPE's partner NOMADESC continues to respond to the urgent needs of the communities with which they work. NOMADESC works to defend the rights of Colombian communities and trade unionists through education, accompaniment of advocates and mobilization. They are an integral part of human rights defence work in the south-west of the country working directly with unions, women, indigenous, afro-Colombian and campesino communities.

COLOMBIA – SINTRACUAVALLE

SINTRACUAVALLE is CUPE's partner union of water workers in the public water and wastewater utility ACUAVALLE. It celebrated its 50th anniversary in February and has a long history struggling against privatization and promoting public ownership and operation of water services.

At the national level, 30 per cent of Colombians do not have access to potable water. The Colombian government's solution to this program is a P3 driving "Water for Prosperity" plan that will include guaranteed profit and incentives for private companies interested to make water a lucrative commodity.

SINTRACUAVALLE is located in the Valle de Cauca region, an area highly affected by violence during 50 years of civil war. It is a region with high rates of unemployment and poverty making public water a vital service to the families living in this area of Colombia; 95 per cent of the population are poor.

Over this past year, SINTRACUAVALLE has prioritized municipal lobbying and has been conducting meetings and forums with municipal councils about the work of ACUAVALLE and the importance of keeping water as a public good. Public activities such as ACUAVALLE in the Park have garnered public support for the union and the public utility. In addition, the union is focusing on creating partnerships with communities in the Valle de Cauca region who are managing their own water services and who have requested technical support.

NICARAGUA – MARIA ELENA CUADRA (MEC)

CUPE's partner in Nicaragua is defending the labour and gender rights of women maquila workers. The Maria Elena Cuadra Movement of Employed and Unemployed Women (MEC) is engaging maquila workers in the *Jobs YES, but with Dignity* campaign. It is a campaign about workers' rights in Central America.

The monthly minimum wage for maquila workers in Honduras in 2012 was US \$233 and in Nicaragua was US \$140. This is one of the lowest paid sectors in both of these countries. Forced overtime and long hours undertaking repetitive movements to meet unrealistically high production targets, as well as unsafe working conditions and minimal periods of rest, have left many maquila workers with permanent injuries. Factory owners routinely deny

workers medical care and refuse to pay out compensation for negligence. Labour laws fail to address health and safety risks posed by this industry. In addition, many workers are fired without cause and factories often close up shop overnight, and most often these workers are not given their severance pay.

Women's organizations across Central America have come together as part of a network to work together to tackle some of these problems. Since the 1990's they have framed many of their actions within the *Jobs YES, but with Dignity* campaign. Over the years, stages of the campaign have included: *Health is our right, Jobs YES, but with Dignity* and *Stop workplace violence*. These organizations make clear that maquila workers want to keep their jobs, and therefore boycotting the industry is not the answer. Instead, they are working to change the conditions that these workers face in these factories

Each country has adapted the campaign to their country context. In Nicaragua, MEC focuses on advocacy work to support women to defend their human rights and labour rights from a gender perspective. They use the campaign to raise awareness about the working conditions of women maquila workers and about actions to improve this situation.



HONDURAS – CODEMUH

In Honduras CUPE has partnered with the Honduran Women's Collective (CODEMUH), which specializes in occupational health and safety. They use the *Jobs YES, but with Dignity* to raise awareness about the working conditions of women maquila workers and about actions to improve this situation. They are working to change the labour code in Honduras to include more work-related injuries, raise awareness about the damaging effects of the 12 hour work day, ensure workplace injuries are correctly categorized by the health system and advocate for ergonomically correct work stations.

PHILIPPINES – ACT

CUPE's worker-to-worker solidarity with the Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT) helps to build grassroots unionism in the education sector.

President Aquino celebrated his 4th year in office but the teachers to whom he refers to as one of his "bosses" do not see any reason to celebrate. He has been promoting an anti-teacher, program in the K-12 sector. The national budget does nothing to support the demands of the people because it prioritizes paying external debt instead of providing for social services like education.

ACT is stepping up its efforts for a living wage and quality education for all Filipino people. They are engaged in mobilizations and organizing drives that seek to certify more ACT locals as formal bargaining agents of the teaching and non-teaching personnel in the education sector.

ACT joined the campaign called Save Our Schools (SOS) and joined a task force among local NGO's to pressure the Department of Education to rescind a memo that allows the use of schools during

military operations, something that is against the law in the Philippines.

PHILIPPINES – COURAGE

CUPE has partnered with COURAGE in a worker-to-worker solidarity project defending human rights and the right to public water in the Philippines.

The Water System Employees Response (WATER), a national federation of water district unions affiliated to COURAGE launched a nationwide campaign in 2014. The campaign aims to organize workers and strengthen their unions to better prepare them against the looming onslaught of privatization in the water sector in the Philippines.

Massive worker opposition to privatization halted an earlier attempt by the government to legislate privatization in the water sector. Several bills reemerged that would



▲
COMMUNITY MEETING WITH
NOMADESC IN COLUMBIA

create a foundation for more privatization in the water sector, mainly through through Public-Private Partnership projects, management contracts, concession agreements and many others.

In addition to protests, workers are also organizing and forming new unions and the more established unions are conducting education seminars aimed at a better understanding the policies of privatization, liberalization and deregulation. City and provincial councils are supporting the workers' led campaigns *Water is life*, *Stop Privatization* and *Water, a Human Right*.

Our work with COURAGE, and its WATER network will focus on opposing the Bulk Water Supply Projects in the Philippines and the relentless effort the government to turn over public water services to corporate monopoly control.

BURMA – THE BURMESE WOMEN'S UNION

“To build a sustainable developed and peaceful society, women’s dynamic participation in all levels of the political process is a key foundation” is the slogan often heard at the Burmese Women’s Union (BWU). It is a slogan that reflects the determination of the BWU to achieve their goal.

The BWU held its 7th Congress in Chiang Mai, Thailand in January 2015. Leaders travelled from the border and refugee camps in Thailand, India and China to participate in discussions about the current political situation in Burma and the future direction of the union.

Congress determined that the environment was still not secure for women to meaningfully engage in politics. While many believe there has been genuine democratic reform in Burma, in reality there

are still ongoing armed conflicts in ethnic areas. Women are facing human rights violations, including property theft, sexual violence and loss of life. There is a pervasive culture of impunity that will not be overcome until women are able to participate in all levels of the political processes.

BWU plans to focus on the issues of violence against women, peace building, women’s rights and gender equality and politics in order to create the conditions to establish a genuine democratic federal union. Plans include establishing a hotline for women who experience violence, advocacy for monitoring women’s active involvements in the peace process. The BWU is also working on the production of advocacy handbooks on women political prisoners, domestic violence, sexual harassment and women’s rights.



MOVING FORWARD

There is a great deal of creative thinking and action taking place in the global labour and social movements that support a better world that is just and economically and socially sustainable.

Neither poverty nor inequality is natural or inevitable. The struggle for justice and resistance to oppression is a big part of our international solidarity work. Public services are the great equalizers in a society and keeping services public has never been more important than it is today, both here at home and around the world.

Understanding the intersection of trade deals such as TISA and the right to public water is key to defending and maintaining our public services. Assisting in health and safety training here at home and also in Central

America with our partners in the Maquila zones is fundamental to preserving the safety of workers in the workplace everywhere – so that no corporation thinks it can get away with putting workers in danger.

Our shared experience gives us the opportunity to mount global campaigns against global corporations – to ensure international bodies such as Public Services International are able to defend workers interests at the highest levels and directly on the ground.

We will continue to support our partners work in pursuit of gender equality, peace and justice; for jobs with dignity; a living wage and quality public services for all; and communities free of violence and military presence.

Our struggle is international in scope. We learn from each other, and support one another to develop strategies to overcome injustice in the workplace and in our communities.

Despite the challenges, we have the power of the majority of the world's people on our side. And that is very powerful.

We thank the many CUPE members, locals and divisions who contribute the Global Justice Fund. Those considering making a contribution to this important work can do so by contacting kcameron@cupe.ca.

Stay connected to CUPE's international solidarity work and subscribe to the Global Justice newsletter at cupe.ca/globaljustice.



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