

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY REPORT 2019-2020



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SOLIDARITY IN ACTION TO BUILD A BETTER WORLD

The past year has shaken our world to its core. Even before the global pandemic hit, it was clear that workers and trade unions are at the heart of the fight for public services, fair wages and decent working conditions. COVID-19 has fully exposed how essential workers and public services are to our communities, our collective well-being, and our survival.

Living through COVID-19 has also strengthened our resolve. CUPE stands in solidarity with workers organizing for communities and workplaces to be free from discrimination and oppression, and for respect and justice. Our union is part of the struggle for a world where everyone's needs are met, where there is no gap between rich and poor, and where governments make decisions that prioritize the public good, not private profits. We will keep pushing for a world where Indigenous rights are respected, where water and land are valued as a common good, and where safeguarding the environment is a priority.

Across the globe, movements are demanding change. In the past year, we have seen

protests for climate justice and respect for Indigenous rights, opposing austerity, privatization and corruption in Latin America and the Middle East, and against gender-based violence in Mexico, Chile and Pakistan. The pandemic has not stopped massive global mobilizations asserting that Black Lives Matter.

Our collective fight for economic and social justice knows no borders. Canadian workers demanding fair wages share common cause with public sector workers in the Philippines and garment workers in Bangladesh calling for minimum wages. The struggle for recognition of Indigenous rights in Canada is related to Indigenous resistance to land grabs in Colombia and Guatemala. Water privatization threatens communities everywhere.

Whatever the challenge, solidarity gives us power. CUPE works with unions and social movements internationally because we understand the need to stand together in our shared struggle toward a just world. Until all of us are free, none of us are free.



Mark Hancock
Mark Hancock,
CUPE National President



Charles Fleury
Charles Fleury,
CUPE National Secretary-Treasurer

WORKER-TO-WORKER SOLIDARITY

CUPE DELEGATIONS



SOUTH KOREA: EDUCATION EXCHANGE

In the spring of 2019, CUPE welcomed a 14-member delegation from the Korean Federation of Public Services and Transport Workers' Union (KPTU), South

Korea's largest union. The delegation met with CUPE National Secretary-Treasurer Charles Fleury and CUPE educators to exchange information about our education and member facilitation programs, and about the political situation in our countries.

Workers in South Korea are fighting austerity-driven mass layoffs, wage cuts, privatization and public service cuts. Precarious and unsafe work are on the rise. These conditions resonate with CUPE members and are familiar to public sector workers around the world.

As part of the visit, two KPTU leaders attended the CUPE Newfoundland and Labrador Division Convention. They also took part in CUPE's first-ever regional Global Justice conference, hosted by CUPE NL. The event, *Building Global Solidarity: 'Come from Away, Here to Stay,'* focused on the need for international solidarity and migrant rights. KPTU education director Kyungkyu Yang urged delegates to make international solidarity a daily practice, and to focus on collective actions that would bring about change.



▲ KPTU MEMBER CALLS FOR AN END TO ATTACKS ON LABOUR RIGHTS, MAY DAY 2019 RALLY, TORONTO.

◀ COMMUNITY MEMBERS GATHER AFTER A MASSACRE OF INDIGENOUS LEADERS, TACUEYO, COLOMBIA.



The visit also coincided with International Workers' Day on May 1. KPTU members marked this day by joining a demonstration of airport workers at Toronto's Pearson Airport. The annual event was a reminder that workers around the globe are united in their opposition to the capitalist system. Our unions hope to complete the exchange with a CUPE delegation to South Korea in the future.

COLOMBIA: SOLIDARITY WITH WORKERS AND ACTIVISTS

In the fall of 2019, CUPE National President Mark Hancock travelled to Colombia to meet with social movement and union leaders. CUPE was hosted by our partners NOMADESC, a research and human rights organization, and SINTRACUAVALLE, the union representing water workers at Colombia's only public water provider.

Our delegation to Colombia took place at a crucial time. Black, Indigenous and

campesino communities are facing a wave of extreme violence. The communities where our partners work and organize are experiencing human rights violations. Social movement leaders and former members of the now-demobilized guerrilla movement, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), are being targeted for assassination. The lack of implementation of the peace accords signed in 2016 between the Colombian government and FARC has created a very volatile situation. It is also creating the conditions for new expressions of social solidarity.

NOMADESC's work has focused on communities in the city of Buenaventura, home to the country's largest port. The city's Afro-Colombian community has faced discrimination and exclusion for decades, and the repression has escalated with a government push for port development on their land. The community led a successful strike in 2017, where thousands

took to the streets to protest and paused the development. Our delegation met with the Buenaventura Civic Strike Committee and was present for local government elections where Victor Vidal, a strike leader and spokesperson, was elected mayor of Buenaventura.

The murder of five Indigenous leaders in the community of Tacueyo on the eve of our delegation's visit was a tragic reminder of the dangers faced by activists in the country. Our delegation joined a gathering the next day that brought together hundreds of members from the surrounding communities. They met to grieve and to organize, showing incredible courage in the face of tragedy.

CUPE's delegation also met with leaders and members of SINTRACUAVALLE, who are leading a courageous fight against water privatization, undeterred by threats and violence. CUPE representatives toured a public water treatment

◀ **CUPE'S NATIONAL PRESIDENT WITH ACTIVISTS FROM NOMADESC AND MOVICE (MOVEMENT OF VICTIMS OF STATE CRIMES), COLOMBIA.**

facility, and were honoured to attend a union meeting for community members who are fighting for public water services.

CUBA: RENEWING PARTNERSHIPS

In 2019, a joint CUPE National-CUPE BC delegation visited our Cuban partner union. Our union has worked with the National Union of Public Administration Workers (SNTAP in Spanish) for decades.

The visit wrapped up a five-year project that developed and delivered shop steward training, including setting up and equipping three union training classrooms. Delegation members worked with SNTAP representatives to plan the next steps in our ongoing partnership. They also heard about changes planned for Cuba's economy, and learned about the conditions of workers and unions,

including the impact of the worsening US embargo.

There are 19 national unions in Cuba, under the umbrella of the CTC, the Central de Trabajadores de Cuba. Fully 94 per cent of workers are unionized, with independent workers (such as street artists and market vendors) unionized through co-ops.

In recent years, Cuba has continued to decentralize the country's economic system and shift non-strategic industries like hospitality from the state to the cooperative and small business sectors. Public sector unions like SNTAP are now organizing workers in these emerging sectors, including several thousand in Havana alone. These new members get training in stewarding, union leadership and health and safety.

SNTAP's main challenge is the ongoing US blockade. The blockade has severely limited access to medication, hospital

equipment, fuel, school and office furniture, and other basic supplies like paper or car parts.

The Cuban economy is facing new challenges from a worsening fuel shortage. Cuba used to get most of its petroleum from Venezuela, often in exchange for medical and educational services. However, strict US sanctions imposed in 2018 on Venezuela, coupled with the tightening of the embargo against Cuba, mean few shipping companies are willing to transport oil from Venezuela to Cuba. The fuel shortages have led to reduced public transit, a lack of fuel for union vehicles, and shortages of electricity generated by diesel-fueled power plants.

Despite limitations caused by the sanctions, the delegation witnessed the resourcefulness and ingenuity of Cubans, and learned first-hand about alternative economic systems and workers' resistance to capitalism.





CUPE'S GLOBAL JUSTICE FUND IN ACTION

In 2019-2020, CUPE's Global Justice Fund supported workers and community allies in Burma, Canada, Colombia, Cuba, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and the Philippines. The fund supported ten projects working for peace, advancing labour and gender rights, defending human rights, building trade union capacity, fighting water privatization, promoting public services and raising awareness among CUPE members. Here are the ways some of our partners and allies took action to build a better world.

◀ **DEMANDING JUSTICE FOR SEXUAL VIOLENCE COMMITTED DURING GUATEMALA'S INTERNAL ARMED CONFLICT.**

CANADA

For decades, Canada's Temporary Foreign Worker Program has made it difficult for caregivers, and impossible for migrant workers in other sectors, to become permanent residents. This has led to widespread complaints and well-documented cases of exploitation and abuse of workers at the hands of employers and recruiters. The Migrant Justice Program run by KAIROS works to address the root causes of forced migration, while promoting a climate of dignity and welcome for uprooted people.

The overall project and workshops support key migrant worker demands for permanent residency on arrival, open work permits for all workers, and better access to support services. Last year, KAIROS worked with Migrante Canada to launch a workshop series that focused on capacity building for migrant workers, including being aware of their rights, supporting their ability to self-organize, and outlining the legal frameworks providing protection.

The project reached out to migrant workers from diverse sectors including caregivers, agricultural workers, service industry workers and fish plant workers. The outreach connected these workers with migrant worker organizers, local labour experts, social service providers, human rights lawyers, and others who helped them defend their rights.

ALLIANCE OF CONCERNED TEACHERS DEMONSTRATION, PHILIPPINES. ▶

DEMONSTRATING FOR MIGRANT RIGHTS, WINNIPEG.



KAIROS and Migrante are also developing a support network of church and trade union allies for migrant workers who are asserting their rights.

crimes and have been arrested. Legitimate criticism of the government has led to surveillance, harassment, intimidation, threats and even death.

PHILIPPINES

Social movements, trade unions, media outlets, farmers and Indigenous organizations continue to be the target of Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte's repressive policies and actions. Human rights defenders have had their offices raided, been falsely accused of

Leaders are targeted because of their work to ensure safety, security and a higher standard of living for the country's most marginalized people. The government is "red tagging" any of its political opponents as being linked to the Communist Party of the Philippines' New People's Army. This sweeping move includes leaders of legal



**TAVOYAN WOMEN'S UNION INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY
2020 WORKSHOP, MYANMAR/BURMA.**

organizations like unions, and human rights activists. Our union has joined the global outcry against red tagging.

Recently, the Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT) has documented 36 cases of illegal profiling and 19 incidents of death threats or intimidation against its leaders, including ACT Secretary General Raymond Basilio. This has provoked fear among teachers, and many are afraid to take part in union activities. ACT's 'Hands Off Our Teachers' campaign has exposed police profiling of ACT leaders and undue surveillance. The campaign has broad support from the media, lawmakers, public personalities and various institutions.

The Duterte regime has also targeted Indigenous peoples and organizations, the largest group being the Lumad people. Most Lumad people live in the province of Mindanao, where many have been displaced to the mountains by mining companies and wealthy land-owners. Lumad schools, which offer traditional teachings, have been destroyed or used for military operations. In 2019, all 55 Lumad schools were closed, forcing the students to leave their communities. Through the Save Our Schools Network, ACT has launched various actions to condemn these closures and to support the continuing education of the Lumad students.



Our other partner, the Confederation for Unity, Recognition and Advancement of Government Employees (COURAGE), unites many of the country's public sector unions. COURAGE's recent focus has been a campaign to achieve a national minimum wage. This work is happening despite ongoing government harassment and intimidation.

In 2019, Antonietta Setias Dizon, COURAGE's former secretary general, was illegally detained. Other COURAGE members have also been detained on trumped-up charges, including Juan Alexander Reyes, Rowen Rosales, and Oliver Rosales. To protest these illegal detentions, COURAGE created the campaign "Free the COURAGE 4," and continues to struggle for justice for all illegally detained activists and to stop the targeting of trade union activists.

MYANMAR/BURMA

Since the Tavoyan Women's Union (TWU) was formed in 1995 along the Thai-Burma border, leadership programs have been central to their work promoting women's rights and encouraging women to become political and community leaders. Women are underrepresented at all levels of government and have little presence in the peace process. The TWU represents women of the Tavoyan minority ethnic group from the Tanintharyi Region in southern Burma.

TWU is based in the city of Dawei, which is geographically isolated from the rest of Burma. Low economic development has left the region with high levels of poverty, and Tavoyan girls are particularly vulnerable to trafficking and forced prostitution.

As part of their work on gender equality and female representation in leadership, TWU has created and delivered a comprehensive four-month political empowerment training program for young women. The program offers a wide range of courses on topics including human rights, reproductive health, gender-based violence, the current transition from military rule to democratic leadership, media skills, and computer literacy. The program gives students the opportunity to apply their skills in their community.

Other work focused on gender-based violence, including defining what it is, why it is widespread in the community, how it can be reduced, and what laws exist in Burma. These are pressing issues for the women who participated, as they have been the target of different types of violence and lack knowledge on how to report or bring forward issues. Many women in the region have shown interest in this program in the future.

NICARAGUA

Nicaragua has been in a political crisis since the International Monetary Fund (IMF) imposed drastic austerity on the country in 2018. There have been mass protests against cuts to the country's social safety net. The instability has economic and social repercussions that affect women workers in the country.

CUPE supports the Maria Elena Cuadra Movement of Employed and Unemployed Women (MEC) to provide training, advocacy and legal support to women in the municipalities of Managua, Ciudad Sandino and Tipitapa. They work specifically with women workers in Nicaragua's free trade zones, home workers and small-scale farmers.

MEC Director Sandra Ramos says the situation in Nicaragua has worsened since 2018. Workers in the sweatshop, or maquila, sector have always mobilized for better working conditions and decent work. Since the introduction of austerity measures, state security forces have clamped down on these actions. The economic instability that followed the wave of protests and violence has made maquila employment more precarious. MEC reports

that more than 2,000 jobs in the free trade zone have been lost since protests first broke out.

Last year, despite the challenges generated by ongoing political, social and economic instability, MEC was able to engage hundreds of women in trainings about labour rights and women's rights. MEC's legal clinic also assisted over 1,500 workers and accompanied maquila workers in representations before legal institutions when their labour rights have been violated.

GUATEMALA

The Campesino Committee of the Highlands (CCDA) defends the rights of workers on large coffee, sugar and cotton plantations. CCDA also works to recover lands taken from the Mayan communities over the past centuries, and promotes Mayan culture and



CCDA ACTIVISTS WITH THEIR BULLETIN, PENSAMIENTO CAMPESESINO (CAMPESESINO THOUGHT). ▶

spirituality. Today, about 100 communities in 11 Guatemalan provinces belong to the CCDA. The organization is strongest in the Madre Vieja valley of Sololá.

Guatemala has already been affected by droughts and floods because of climate change. Now, several CCDA communities have lost access to water because large sugar, banana and palm oil plantations are diverting rivers to irrigate their crops. These plantations have also polluted water sources by pumping untreated chemical fertilizer, pesticide runoff and mill waste directly into rivers. The diversion of rivers by hydro-electric projects, primarily to provide power for the mining sector, is making this situation worse.

In the face of this crisis, CCDA and its allies have worked to stop the diversion of rivers and to recognize access to water as a fundamental right. CCDA worked with communities in several Guatemalan provinces to train members on their community rights to water, and the responsibilities of the Guatemalan state in protecting them. They also coordinated local campaigns to prevent the privatization and diversion of water sources.

It is an ongoing struggle. In 2017, following massive mobilization and advocacy work, the Mayan community was able to free six rivers and restore community access to these

water sources. The following year, groups linked to large landowners blocked further moves to protect community water access. Defending water rights has come at a high cost. Local organizers and activists have faced a recent wave of assassinations, threats and criminalization. In 2019, human rights groups documented 36 assassinations of community activists and the criminalization (detained, facing legal action or with arrest warrants pending) of 5,748 others. The CCDA has provided support and legal accompaniment for the threatened water defenders.

HONDURAS

In 2019, the Honduran congress introduced a law that opened the door to privatization of health care and education. The bill enacted loan conditions imposed by the IMF. Hondurans fought back with large protests organized by the Platform in Defense of Public Health and Education, a coalition led by teachers and doctors' organizations. The regime responded with repression by security forces. Dozens of protesters were injured and many more detained.

CUPE's partner in the country is CODEMUH, the Honduran Women's Collective. CODEMUH is a feminist, community-based organization that fights gender-based violence and addresses violence and health and safety in the manufacturing sector and

textile factories. The collective provides workers with organizing support, as well as training, medical and legal assessments.

Despite the violent response from security forces, CODEMUH joined tens of thousands of Hondurans in the historic struggle to protect public health and education. The actions forced the president and congress to withdraw the proposed laws that had opened the door to privatizing public services.

The economic and social instability generated by the resistance to privatization, along with the widespread infiltration of the government by organized crime, have triggered waves of migration from the country, particularly from the northern region where CODEMUH works. Thousands of Hondurans have gathered in the northern industrial centre of San Pedro Sula to join migrant caravans seeking to make their way to the United States. This has affected CODEMUH's work, as trained shop-floor advocates in the textile factories have joined the exodus North, leaving organizing gaps in the maquilas.

Over the past year, CODEMUH also represented several maquila workers in hearings challenging health and safety rights violations, and for the reinstatement and accommodation of injured workers.

WORKING WITH OUR ALLIES

THE FUTURE IS PUBLIC CONFERENCE

CUPE joined progressive voices from around the world, including labour leaders, researchers, and grassroots activists, in an event to bolster the global movement to reverse privatization and bring public services back in house.

The Future is Public conference continued the important work CUPE does with our Canadian and international allies to end privatization and demand strong, well-funded public services. The conference, held in Amsterdam in late 2019, was attended by over 350 diverse voices from around the world. It was an important opportunity for CUPE to showcase our work

to fight privatization, as well as a chance to learn how our union can strengthen our collective work and build international networks of solidarity.

CUPE led a discussion about public sector pensions and the role they play in the privatization of public infrastructure around the world. Our workshop focused on the need to find ways to hold workers' pension funds accountable for their investment decisions, and to ensure they are not contributing to privatization.

Conference discussions focused on the need for decisive action. Cities and the workers who keep our communities running are on the front lines of today's most urgent challenges, including fighting climate change and rising inequality, as well as defending the rights of the most vulnerable. Conference participants strategized on public solutions to these global problems.

New research launched at the conference documents more than 1,400 examples of privatization being reversed, across all sectors, including more than 50 Canadian cases.

COP25 UNITED NATIONS CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE

In September 2019, millions of people around the world took part in climate strikes to demand strong and immediate actions to save our planet. The science is clear: world government commitments to reduce



greenhouse gas emissions made in Paris in 2015 are not enough to limit global warming and avoid a climate catastrophe in the not too distant future.

With this urgency in mind, union representatives from every continent attended COP25 in Madrid in December 2019. CUPE National Secretary-Treasurer Charles Fleury led a CUPE delegation that joined other unions and civil society representatives to pressure politicians to adopt more ambitious national targets by 2020, a goal that would get us to net-zero emissions by 2050.

After a year of grassroots mobilization around the world, many expected that countries would agree on common solutions at the conference. Determination was high, and the energy reached its peak during a climate march that brought hundreds of thousands of people into the streets. However, political leaders in the conference hall ignored the calls for urgent action and climate justice. Demands for

a just transition specific to workers and respect for human rights and Indigenous rights were largely dismissed. In addition, governments will not live up to their Paris Agreement commitments to help developing countries face the impacts of climate change. The conference also fell short by failing to reach an agreement on international carbon trade rules.

The fight for our future is certainly not over, and CUPE will continue to work for climate justice in our union, in Canada and around the world.

PSI INTERAMERICAN REGIONAL CONFERENCE

Fighting privatization, defending labour rights and demanding fair taxation were high on the agenda when public sector workers from across the Americas and the Caribbean gathered in Argentina in 2019 at a Public Services International (PSI) conference.

CUPE is a member of PSI, the global trade union federation representing more than 20 million public sector workers in 163 countries around the world. The PSI Interamerican Regional Conference, or IAMRECON, takes place every five years. The theme in 2019 was "Defending the state from corporate power."

Delegates discussed the urgent need for solidarity in the Americas and Caribbean. Workers from equity-seeking groups in Brazil are facing a right-wing, racist government. Union activists in countries including Colombia and Guatemala are confronting ongoing violence. And migrants continue to leave Central America and Venezuela because of deteriorating economic and social conditions.

Conference participants strategized about solutions to common struggles facing workers including the threat of climate change, rising corporate power, the growing reach of international trade agreements and digitalization in the public sector. They also spoke about the need for tax justice, including its role in fairly funding public services for all. Many developing countries are locked into high levels of debt that come with harsh conditions, including forced privatization. This increases inequality and undermines progress to protect and expand public services.



◀ CLIMATE RALLY, COP25 CONFERENCE,
MADRID, SPAIN.



Since the spread of COVID-19, the value of these gatherings and the need for collective action and solidarity is clearer than ever. On June 23, 2020, PSI affiliates in the United States and Canada held a virtual meeting. The meeting, which marked UN Public Service Day, focused on the crisis facing public sector workers and the work we must undertake in our unions and together to build a more just and equitable society. CUPE took part in the meeting and was among the unions that raised concerns about the situation in long-term care homes, and the need for a clear fightback strategy to resist an austerity-driven recovery. Participants were united in condemning the racial injustice brought to light by the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Eric Garner, Ahmaud Arbery and so many others in the US and Canada, and called for an examination of necessary social spending and police reforms to address systemic racism.

UN COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Every year, CUPE joins the Canadian labour movement and global social movements at the United Nations in New York City for the annual Commission on the Status of Women meetings. These meetings of governments, UN agencies and global civil society focus on the progress made and challenges that remain to achieving women's rights, gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. Due to COVID-19, the 2020 meeting was scaled down to one day, without the participation of global civil society members.

The result was a profoundly disappointing declaration that the global trade union movement described as "weak and uninspiring." Among many criticisms, unions took issue with the fact that the declaration "reinforces failed economic models and policies of austerity

and privatization by calling for public-private partnerships (P3s) to meet commitments to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls." The global union response also pointed out that the UN's own expert on extreme poverty and human rights condemns austerity and privatization for "systematically eliminating human rights protections and further marginalising those living in poverty." The union statement goes on to point out these policies have increased the burden of unpaid care work for women.

CUPE will continue to promote public services as the key to women fully enjoying human rights, and will push our government and governments around the world to live up to their responsibility to provide quality, universal, gender-responsive public services.

MOVING FORWARD



This report on our 2019-2020 international solidarity work was being finalized as COVID-19 spread around the globe. It outlines the struggles and gains of our partner organizations prior to the pandemic. Reflecting on the past few months, many of



our challenges remain the same, but the urgent need for fundamental change is even more pressing.

The global economic system was in crisis long before COVID-19. The pandemic has made millions of workers even more precarious, and left families without livelihoods. Millions more essential workers have continued working, endangering their lives. Migrant workers and workers in the global supply chains, most of them women and racialized, have been treated as if they are disposable.

Moving forward, we will continue to be part of collective actions to demand a people-centered recovery to COVID-19. CUPE is committed to building a more connected, coordinated and powerful international movement. The powerful economic, corporate and political forces behind right-wing governments are global, and our response must be as well.

The coming months and years hold new challenges. We will work to find new ways to stay safely connected. We will not let distance divide us or dilute our power, and we will ensure our recovery from COVID-19 is founded in solidarity. CUPE is working with unions internationally to strengthen our movement and to seize the

opportunities to organize for a public future — one that ensures an economy that puts people's needs before profits and guarantees equal access to public services and decent work.

Through worker-to-worker connections, and through CUPE's Global Justice Fund, we will continue to support global movements for human rights, labour protection, peace and justice. CUPE stands united with workers around the world challenging privatization, poverty, racism, austerity, corruption and war. And we will keep resisting these same forces in Canada.

If your local is interested in supporting the CUPE National Global Justice Fund and our union's international solidarity work, visit cupe.ca/international-solidarity or contact International Solidarity Officer Kelti Cameron at kcameron@cupe.ca.

**TOGETHER, LET'S KEEP
BUILDING A BETTER
WORLD.**



**CUPE National Global Justice
Committee members 2018-2019**

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Charlottetown, PEI
CUPE 8920 – Nova Scotia Acute
Care, Amherst, NS
CUPE 3067 – New Dawn Guest
Home, Sydney, NS
CUPE 1876 – Northside Community
Guest Home, Sydney, NS
Joshua Berson Photography



CUPE GLOBAL JUSTICE

cupe.ca/international-solidarity