



On the International Day of Human Rights, civil society demands greater coherence in EU foreign policy.

Brussels, Tuesday, 10 December 2013. On International Human Rights' Day, civil society networks Alop, Cifca, Grupo Sur, Oidhaco and Protection International urge the EU to make the respect of human rights the guiding principle in its trade relations with Latin America.

The European Parliament ratified trade agreements with Colombia, Peru and Central America in December 2012. This caused deep concern in civil society because of the asymmetries between both regions, as well as the prevalence of economic interests over the upholding of human rights.

The undersigned organisations believe that these trade agreements risk exacerbating social inequalities, as well as giving rise to the exploitation of natural resources. In Latin America, women and men who have peacefully spoken out against the situation, which often results in the violation of economic, social, environmental and cultural rights of entire communities face threats, physical assaults, arbitrary detentions, assassinations and forced displacements from authorities and non-state actors.

In light of this, civil society networks urge the EU to continue supporting protection policies for human rights defenders in the region. For these policies to be comprehensive, they should include preventative measures and provide for the investigation of aggressions. In particular, it is recommended that the EU pays special attention to community-based, indigenous and Afro-descendant defenders who defend natural resources, land use and their territories and who usually live in remote areas.

Although the EU has played a significant role in the promotion and respect for human rights, by this appeal the undersigned organisations outline that the EU's commitment should be applied consistently taking into account its trade relations with Colombia, Peru and Central America, to ensure that the trade agreements do not undermine economic, social, cultural and environmental rights.

Moreover, the organisations share the appeal of UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier de Schutter, who in his closing remarks to the 15th EU-NGO Forum on Human Rights held in Brussels, 5-6 December, stressed the need of the EU to "practice what it preaches in order to enhance its credibility" at home and abroad.