

Declaration of the III European-Latin American-Caribbean Civil Society Forum, 30 March-1 April 2006, Vienna, Austria

PREAMBLE.

Summoned by the Latin American Association of Development Organizations (Asociación Latinoamericana de Organizaciones de Promoción, ALOP), the Latin American Council for Adult Education (Consejo de Educación de Adultos de América Latina, CEAAL), Inter-American Platform of Human Rights, Democracy and Development (Plataforma Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, Democracia y Desarrollo, PIDHDD), The Copenhagen Initiative for Central America and Mexico (La Iniciativa de Copenhague para Centro América y México, CIFCA), Eurostep, Grupo Sur, 11.11.11. (Belgium), EED (Germany), Cordaid, Hivos, ICCO and Novib (Netherlands), the social organizations that gathered in the III Euro-Latin American-Caribbean Civil Society Forum wish to propose to the Governments of the European Union (EU), Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), the necessity that in the IV Summit of Heads of State and Government, to take place in Vienna in the upcoming month of May, a significant advancement be achieved in the realization of a more fair, democratic, and supportive biregional strategic partnership for our regions. Therefore, we invite the Heads of State and Government that are going to meet in Vienna to take into account the following considerations and proposals:

CONSIDERATIONS.

We welcome the disposition to a dialogue that the participating governments of the IV Summit of EU-LAC Heads of States and Governments have expressed; and the important recognition to incorporate in the debate the considerations and proposals developed by the different civil society actors participating in this process.

We uphold the importance given to social cohesion in the latest European Commission Communication "A stronger partnership between the European Union and Latin America" in order to strengthen the EU-LAC partnership. Nevertheless, we consider it is necessary to have a more precise definition of what we understand by social cohesion and a more tangible formulation of strategies and policies to achieve it.

We consider necessary that the biregional partnership has an integral character and that all of the initiatives to promote it be in accordance with the prevailing international agreements on Human Rights. Therefore, all initiatives should consider the economic, political, social, cultural and environmental implications and should previously evaluate its possible impacts on our societies.

The EU-LAC biregional partnership, as it is being constructed, is guided by a free trade doctrine, the privatization of public goods and services, the promotion and protection of investments that benefit the international financial system and large economic groups. This course of action aggravate the effects derived from a model of development and subordinated insertion of LAC countries into the international economy and politics, which generate a greater concentration of wealth, the expansion of the social gap, social exclusion and poverty.

Within this context, we warn that poverty and social exclusion increasingly affect our people and the problems generated by the current development model equally concern, at different levels, the European citizens as well as Latin American and Caribbean citizens. Only through a joint mobilization the problems can be overcome and will allow to build the social welfare in both continents.

The EU-LAC biregional partnership must contribute to promote an inclusive, equitable and sustainable development of our societies, which allows the full realization of the individual and collective abilities and capabilities, securing an ecological balance and cultural and environmental patrimonies for present and future generations, which must be the overarching objective of economic activities.

In our judgment the present situation derives from decision-making structures that in the definition and implementation of development policies and strategies exclude the participation of democratic entities for public control as well as the participation of citizens and its collective representatives, penalizing in this way the lives of the majority.

Globalization has led to a new reality that requires overcoming fundamentalisms, cherishing multiculturalism, diversity and recognition of the rights of indigenous populations and ethnic communities; a fight against all ways of discrimination with especial emphasis on discrimination of gender, race, beliefs and sexual preferences.

The participation of civil society is one of the main components to achieve a more equitable and supportive relations between the EU and LAC. Civil society involvement as a crucial actor in the EU-LAC relations can not be constrain to particular moments or specific issues but it must be conceived as part of a process that would allow for a real participation of citizens in the decision-making concerning biregional relations.

We consider that the process of the biregional strategic partnership must be based on the commitment to peace, prevention and peaceful resolution of conflicts, and it is incompatible with militarization and pre-emptive security strategies. Therefore, the active role of civil society is key in building peace and preventing armed conflict.

RECOMENDATIONS AND PROPOSALS.

Taking into consideration the realities of the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean and the recent historical process of our regions, the organizations participating in the III Forum, recommend to the EU-LAC Heads of State and Government the following:

For a biregional partnership in favor of development and combating poverty and exclusion:

That the establishment of a more fair and supportive partnership between the EU and LAC defines as a central objective the achievement of an inclusive, equitable and sustainable economic development for both regions that promotes affirmative actions in defense and respect for Human Rights; these to be understood broadly and including economic, social, cultural, environmental, sexual and reproductive rights and food security according to the international declarations and agreements which our countries are signatories to.

The present partnership cannot be exclusively constructed around the Association Agreements already put into place, nor like the ones that are currently in negotiation between the EU and the different countries and regions of LAC. Therefore we call for a revision of the trade agreements already in place and those that are currently in negotiation process between the EU and the different countries of LAC, in order to incorporate the evident imbalances among the parties and call for an inclusion of clauses for Special and Differential Treatment, the exclusion of sensitive economic sectors, the creation of compensatory funds and the safeguards for state autonomy in the economic management of the countries.

It is necessary to comply with the commitments to eliminate internal subsidy practices that sustain export prices from developed countries or that promote the protection of local producers against the imports from countries of LAC.

Moreover, it is necessary that the Association Agreements adopt mandatory mechanisms, with the same applicable indicators and parameters prevailing in the countries of origin, in order to evaluate the performance of the European transnationals in the LAC countries.

In this context, the negotiations of a possible Association Agreement between the EU and Central America, which will be announced soon, should take into consideration the existing asymmetric conditions and foresee mechanisms that will impede the exacerbation of inequity and inequality in the societies of Central America. This same cautionary principle should be considered for future negotiations of Association Agreements between the EU and the countries and sub-regional blocks in LAC.

Given the importance of our countries' external debt in the deterioration of social cohesion, it is essential that this issue receives special attention within the political dialogue between the EU and LAC. Moreover, we call for an adequate management of this problem by contemplating the condemnation or elimination of debt and the creation of independent arbitration mechanisms on

its legitimacy. We support the formulation of policies of debt conversion into development investment and the creation of a Biregional Solidarity Fund as a means for this end.

The focal point on the combat against poverty and social exclusion should be centered on the problems of social inequity, the lack of decent work and ethnic, racial and gender discrimination. The fight against poverty and inequity should take special consideration of: redistributive policies, the strengthening of public institutions, a functioning autonomous judicial system, progressive fiscal reforms, agrarian reforms, the quality of education, the preservation of common public goods and their decentralized public management.

Promote initiatives of action against poverty that include decentralized and participatory cooperation which stimulates productive transformation, local development, strengthening of cooperatives and the social economy, family agriculture and the small and medium enterprises.

The relevance of migration processes and the forms of discrimination that immigrants are subjected to, leads us to request the implementation of policies that guarantee the free movement of people and the full recognition of their Human Rights as citizens anywhere these people might happen to be.

For an active participation of civil society in the construction of a biregional partnership:

We consider indispensable the strengthening of the capacities of civil society in order to effectively participate in the design, implementation and monitoring of public development policies and social programs.

This new orientation will require the democratization of democracy, the effective participation of national and sub-regional parliaments of LAC (CAN, MERCOSUR, SICA), the European Parliament and the political parties in the elaboration processes of proposals, policies and agreements.

The practice of a participative democracy and the use of referendums and plebiscites in the decision-making processes that influence development strategies are fundamental in such processes; they require the creation of new institutions that will facilitate the direct participation of citizens.

The application of the democratic clause that is stipulated in the agreements between the EU and the LAC countries and regions must have a positive dimension: mandatory application within a broad perspective of Human Rights, with reciprocity and effective mechanisms for participation of civil society at the national and regional levels.

In view of the above, citizen participation requires the construction of a new democratic political culture; new institutions and of a judicial and financial recognition that will guarantee its continuity, operation and mandatory nature in as far as a right of our societies to participate in the definition of the development policies to which we aspire to.

The training of citizens requires greater efforts in the area of education and the forging of collective entities, valuing and stimulating their expression in public spaces, while counting with the appropriate policies and resources.

The dissemination and transparency of information in all the phases and processes of design and implementation of development policies, including all the biregional Association Agreements, is an indispensable condition for the legitimization and the success of these policies. Social audits and the permanent monitoring by civil society in the implementation of biregional partnership policies are necessary conditions to guarantee the efficacy and the social impact of these policies, as well as to combat corruption.

In the relations between the EU and LAC countries, we demand the inclusion of civil society representatives in the official delegations, representatives that should be selected in mutual agreement with the organizations representing civil society of each country.

For a development cooperation that contributes to combat poverty and inequity:

EU aid represents 40% of the Official Development Assistance (ODA) received by LAC. It is necessary to improve the quality, quantity and reliability of aid. We believe necessary to include in future cooperation the recommendations of the Evaluation of the Regional Strategy of the European Commission in Latin America (1996-2006). Furthermore, support is required for other financial mechanisms for development in the area of international taxation that are promoted by some LA and EU countries.

We propose to implement in the EU-LAC cooperation the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness which recommends:

Strengthening partner countries' national development strategies and associated operational frameworks;

Increasing alignment of aid with partner countries' priorities, systems and procedures and helping to strengthen their capacities;

Enhancing donors' and partner countries' respective accountability to their citizens and parliaments;

Eliminating duplication of efforts and rationalizing donor activities;

Introduce results-oriented indicators in aid programming;

Reforming and simplifying donor policies and procedures;

Implement new aid modalities: move from a logic of projects to programs.

It is the responsibility of civil society and private development organizations to act in the improvement of the quality of cooperation, increasing transparency and searching for greater coordination around local agendas.

In the design and implementation of EU country and sub-region strategies for LAC, we recommend to promote the necessary consultations and institutionalized dialogue with civil society, which will imply the definition of mechanisms for its implementation and monitoring.

Promote the social monitoring in all phases of a program, with the participation of diverse social actors and the in situ evaluation of projects. For this, it will be necessary to have sufficient information and capabilities and to assume the commitment of greater transparency and accountability of all cooperation programs.

Define the specific legislative frameworks for EU-LAC cooperation that will allow flexibility in procedures, overcoming actual burdensome regulations, which we consider in diverse aspects to be obsolete. Likewise, the governments of LAC should design development cooperation policies that are transparent in dialogue with civil society organizations in their respective countries.

The EU should continue to strengthen its support to initiatives of truth, justice and reparation in Latin America, as a guarantee for the strengthening of democracies in the region.

We consider positive that the EU maintains and strengthens its support towards a regional integration, extending it to new fields as trans-border cooperation, social development and the strengthening of local identities as well as the effective participation of civil society in the integration processes.

The Colombian conflict, the initiative of the Plan Colombia and the Andean Regional Initiative constitute one of the most serious and pressing problems in the Latin-American region. It is fundamental that the EU and the LAC countries search for new alternatives for these plans, as a disposition to assist a negotiated solution and put an end to the escalating Colombian conflict and its eventual spill over to neighboring countries and the region as a whole. The cooperation assistance should call for respect to Human Rights, promotion of peace and the strengthening of the necessary mechanisms and institutions required for democratic governance and the functioning of the rule of law.

Haiti constitutes a drama for the LAC region. Adding to the extreme poverty and inequality that have historically characterized this country, are the dire consequences ushered in by the latest political struggles. Given this, we call on the Heads of State and the Governments of the EU and LAC to give preferential attention to the situation in this country, by demanding cancellation of the external debt and the channeling of generous resources so as to overcome the extreme current conditions and to set the bases for a sustainable development in the future.

COMMITMENTS.

The participating organizations in the III Forum assume the following commitments:

To make this Declaration public by all our means available.

To demand greater spaces for dialogue with the authorities in relation to the progress of the EU-LAC biregional partnership and to actively participate in the mechanisms that have been established for this end.

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To disseminate widely to the social organizations in both regions all information available concerning the EU-LAC relations.

To propose to the EU-LAC Trade Union Summit and to the Social Encounter "Linking Alternatives 2", the drafting of a Joint Open Letter to the Heads of State and Government, who will be meeting in the IV Meeting in Vienna, which will address the consensus generated among these initiatives.

To propose a mechanism for coordination among these three platforms which will allow the advancement of a shared political agenda regarding the EU-LAC relations.

To seek the involvement of the national and sub-regional parliaments as well as the European Parliament in the discussion and negotiation of Association Agreements between the EU and the countries and regions of LAC.

Actively participate in the strengthening and articulation of sub-regional integration processes in LAC, bearing in mind the strategic importance of a consolidated regional integration of Latin American and Caribbean in order to achieve a more solid and fair biregional partnership with the EU.

Vienna, April 1, 2006

Source:

<http://www.gloobal.net/iepala/gloobal/fichas/ficha.php?entidad=Textos&id=1832> (Accessed 05/01/2012)