

Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in Latin America  
June 1998

This is a comprehensive report on economic, social and cultural rights in Latin America prepared by the Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America (ICCHRLA). The research is based in part on consultations with human rights organisations in Latin America and their perspectives on the state of economic, social and cultural rights and their suggestions for assistance. There are five components to the report, each of which is included in its entirety in the appendix. These components are: a questionnaire on neoliberal economic policies and social, economic, and cultural rights to which responded 10 human rights groups in Latin America; a comprehensive report on trade, investment and human rights in Latin America; two case studies on Colombia and Mexico; and a compilation of documents prepared by the ICCHRLA for the Santiago Summit and the World Popular Summit.

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The highlights of the questionnaire responses include consensus among respondents that the increase in violations of social, economic and cultural rights in Latin America, such as basic labour rights and that these violations could be addressed through an application of codes of conduct, social clauses, protocols and human rights in trade agreements and national legislation.

The report on trade, investment and human rights in Latin America examines how neoliberal economic policies (privatisation programmes, structural adjustment programs, privatisation) are affecting the economic, social and cultural rights of the peoples of Latin America. Some of these effects include reductions in social spending, deterioration of quality of life, erosion of labour rights through pressures to downsize and sub-contract and through unhealthy and inhuman working conditions, ecological impacts, the erosion of democracy and sovereignty, the concentration of wealth and increasing violence and social unrest. These effects are the result of neoliberal economic policies driven by the World Bank, the IMF, the OAS as well as by NAFTA, the Canada-Cuba Free Trade Agreement, Foreign Investment Protection Agreements, and Mercosur. Focus is placed on Canada's promotion of trade and business in Latin America at the expense of human rights. It also outlines comprehensive policy options and strategies to address the situation (a few are listed below).

Policy Recommendations:

- Canada should incorporate human rights considerations in its promotion of trade and investment as well as into its trade and investment policies and law, specifically:
  - evaluate government benefits to businesses based on their human rights record;
  - provide businesses with information on the human rights records of their trading partners and with guidelines for protecting human rights;
  - publicly address human rights on all trade-related missions;
  - reward good business practices and penalise bad practices that which contribute to the violation of human rights;
  - censure Canadian companies to adhere to human rights standards;
  - appoint an independent team to monitor human rights records in countries with poor human rights records.

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