

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 annexes. 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 Columbia and Mexico; and a compilation of documents prepared by the ICCHRLA for the Santiago Summit and the parallel Popular Summit.

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

The report on trade, investment and human rights in Latin America examines how neoliberal economic policies (stabilisation 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-Chile 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 select 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:
 - condition government benefits to businesses based on their human rights record;
 - provide businesses with information on the human rights conditions of targeted countries and with guidelines for protecting human rights;
 - publicly address human rights on all trade-related missions
 - reward good business practices and penalise bad practices, such as that which contributes to the violation of human rights;
 - exhort Canadian companies to adhere to corporate codes of conducts;
 - appoint an independent team to monitor Canadian companies operating in countries with poor human rights records.