



Joint Declaration
Central American and European Union Advisory Groups
established under the Trade and Sustainable Development Title
of the Association Agreement between the European Union and Central America

Having met today, Friday 13 November 2020, we, the Advisory Groups of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama, together with the European Union Advisory Group, declare that:

- a. The health, economic, human, social and political crisis triggered by **the COVID-19 pandemic** and its impact on health, education, trade and investment systems, decent work and the informal economy, the Sustainable Development Agenda – and even on the development cooperation required to overcome these hurdles – form a historic challenge for the international community and will have profound consequences for all aspects of EU-Central America bilateral relations. The Advisory Groups of this Agreement request that they be informed and consulted on any measures that the Trade and Sustainable Development Board (hereinafter 'the Board') may adopt or implement in response to such challenges.
- b. In the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, it is essential to promote and drive forward the International Labour Organization (ILO) recommendations on social protection, and to include the various sectors of society – in particular workers and employees – in their different forms of representation, in the debate on the social protection measures that should be established and enhance, for the future, public services that meet the basic needs of all citizens. It is crucial that social protection systems are adequately funded and that funds are used transparently.
- c. We support the idea of stepping up efforts to achieve **closer cooperation between the Advisory Groups** on the one hand and between their respective governments in the Central American region and the EU, on the other, so that we can promote integrated, solidarity-based and sustainable responses to the challenges we face.
- d. As Advisory Groups established in the EU and in the various Central American countries under the Trade and Sustainable Development Title, we wish to highlight the need for us – as civil society bodies¹ recognised in the Agreement – to be able to **participate in the monitoring and evaluation of the commitments given** in this area in different chapters of the **EU-Central America Association Agreement**. Due regard for the conventions set out in the chapter on Trade and Sustainable Development is key to ensuring that trade takes place on a level playing field. We

¹ In this Declaration, we consider civil society to be composed of organisations representing workers, employers and NGOs.

reiterate the importance of the Parties to the Agreement implementing the fundamental ILO conventions and promoting and bolstering the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

- e. In line with the priorities set in June 2018 in Brussels by the Board on Trade and Sustainable Development, the Advisory Groups have held a debate on these and, addressing the concerns of all sectors represented in them, **make the following recommendations:**
- to develop, complete and publicise **awareness-raising and capacity-building projects and activities that will assist** both socio-economic actors and the relevant national and local authorities in their efforts to monitor, implement and enforce the environmental and social standards of the chapter on Trade and Sustainable Development;
 - to boost awareness-raising mechanisms and activities, as well as to promote the concept of human rights due diligence, with the aim of increasing the ability of socio-economic players to apply the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights;
 - **to urge the Member States to respond promptly to the comments and complaints** raised in the various forums for social and civic participation concerning, for example, infringements in these areas; to make proposals to remedy precarious situations in the areas of fundamental labour rights, such as freedom of association and trade union activity, collective bargaining, social dialogue and labour market discrimination; to work to eliminate all forms of forced labour and to achieve the effective abolition of child labour;
 - to promote and drive forward, in dialogue with the various stakeholders, **national plans and public policies** that put into practice the UN Guiding Principles on **Business and Human Rights** and ensure implementation of the fundamental conventions of the ILO;
 - to ensure that the crises triggered by COVID-19 and the measures taken to address the challenges arising from these **do not lead to a weakening of social and environmental standards** that aim to protect citizens or, in particular, of the prior and detailed consultations that are needed before starting or expanding certain industrial or extractive activities;
 - to create and share with the Advisory Groups a grid detailing the regional and bilateral cooperation projects covered by the implementation of the Trade and Sustainable Development Title;
 - to **promote trade** in goods and services **conducive to sustainable development** by supporting fair trade initiatives and fostering cooperation between Central American and EU customs administrations and regulatory authorities in order to address technical barriers to such trade. This should include efforts to **facilitate the registration processes** necessary for placing products on the market and for making progress on technical harmonisation processes within both regions;
 - to encourage the holding of seminars or activities focusing on decent work, both in the Central American countries and in the European Union, where employers, trade unions and other groups of citizens can discuss and agree on measures to address this issue.
- f. We consider that, having been operational for five years, it is imperative to **give institutional status to the joint meetings between the Advisory Groups** and to establish **mechanisms for direct dialogue between the Trade and Sustainable Development Board** and the Advisory Groups of the Parties. In particular:

- meetings between the Advisory Groups and the national contact points, to ensure that the exchange of up-to-date and timely information is effective and transparent;
 - meetings of the Advisory Groups – or of a delegation of the Advisory Groups – with the Trade and Sustainable Development Board, prior to their annual meetings. To this end, it is essential to be informed in good time of the date of the meeting and of the meeting agenda;
 - genuinely harness the consultative nature of the Advisory Groups through the Board requesting opinions from them and/or through the Advisory Groups drawing up, on their own initiative, common proposals for the governing bodies of the Agreement.
- g. The Advisory Groups, by common agreement, state their request to be kept informed about the **terms of reference and the EU's ex-post work to evaluate the Agreement** with regard to the Trade and Sustainable Development chapter. We specifically request that, as part of the process of evaluating this chapter, we should be regarded as the primary mechanism for consulting the productive, labour and civil society sectors in their various forms of representation, from the very start of this evaluation process, so as to establish an ongoing and structured dialogue with the Advisory Groups of both Parties at every stage of the process. We call on the Parties to promote, strengthen and support the integration of the Advisory Groups to ensure proper functioning.
- h. The Advisory Groups express their request to be consulted and kept informed, on an annual basis, on the cross-cutting and country-by-country priorities for the implementation of the Sustainable Development chapter of the Agreement proposed by the EU.
- i. The Advisory Groups emphasise the need to further develop an annual action plan to consolidate the work of the Advisory Groups at regional level in Central America and also between the Advisory Groups of both Parties to the Agreement. To this end, we once again reiterate the importance of providing all the institutional, political, operational and financial support needed by civil society organisations to implement the pledge made to enable the Advisory Groups to fulfil their duties and responsibilities in an efficient manner.
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