



Education International

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Principal Regional Coordinator

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Declaration of the 10th Regional Meeting on Public Education and Indigenous Communities

From September 4 – 6, 2023, Indigenous educators representing Latin American trade union organizations came together in Panama for the Tenth Regional Meeting on Public Education and Indigenous Communities. This was convened by Education International Latin America (EILA) in order to share experiences and reflect on the struggles and challenges of the region's Indigenous communities.

The Indigenous communities and nations of Latin America represent 46 million people in the region. We inhabit lands bountiful in biodiversity, forests, pure water, minerals and other natural resources.

The value of our lands and their natural resources are coveted by national and transnational corporations that seek to impose their own development models over them and to destroy our cultures in order to appropriate our territories. The region's Indigenous communities have been fighting for centuries against oppressive policies based on extraction, marginalization, exploitation and racism.

Even in mid-2023, we bear witness to how the region's Indigenous peoples continue to be confronted by by governments and policies that reproduce racist schemes, such as public authorities and policies that make cultural diversity invisible and destroy the cultural traditions of Indigenous nations; municipal, state and national governments that support the invasion of lands by corporations and private entities; companies and non-Indigenous interest groups that allow and promote the persecution, kidnapping and murder of Indigenous leaders; and justice systems that perpetuate impunity in the face of violence against Indigenous nations and the ransacking of their natural resources.

This reality arises from the colonial mindset making up a constituent part of the current economic system that education unions are struggling against, given that it is capitalist, patriarchal, exploitative, exterminating and inequitable.



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In the midst of these ongoing struggles, this Meeting also celebrates the victories of our Indigenous communities, such as the recovery of Indigenous lands in Costa Rica; the partial defeat of the Temporary Framework that sought to reverse the titling of Indigenous territories in Brazil; and Law 88 in Panama, which, among other achievements, guarantees the representation of Indigenous districts in legislation related to educational policy and regulates the appointment of teachers in Indigenous territories.

The member organizations of Education International Latin America (EILA) have worked to achieve greater representation of Indigenous peoples in their structures and in their protest agendas. The ten regional meetings held by Education International Latin America from 2009 up to now provide testimony to these efforts.

In this context, the Indigenous education workers gathered in Panama City, Panama, in representation of trade union organizations affiliated to Education International Latin America (EILA) declare that:

1. We demand that our states and the public policies these enact serve as tools to expand rights and to recognize cultural and linguistic diversity through quality, compulsory, secular, free public education funded by the state at all levels, which is of cultural relevance to each of the Indigenous peoples of Latin America. This must occur within an emancipatory pedagogical model that is free from interference by private, religious, and non-pedagogical interest groups.
2. As Indigenous peoples, we reaffirm that the integrity of our Indigenous territories must be respected. We demand that our ecosystems and our relationship with our lands' resources should neither be threatened nor violated by intrusions from non-Indigenous, national or international interest groups and sectors. This is in view of the historical struggle that Indigenous peoples have engaged in for autonomy and self-determination within our lands.
3. Together with our affiliated trade union organizations, we demand that national authorities guarantee the right to free quality public education for the entire Indigenous population. Such education must respect the sovereignty of our communities and their worldviews. To this end, we insist upon the need to promote greater state funding for public education, such that it is endowed



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with a budget sufficient to overcome the historical shortfalls under which the education of Indigenous peoples has been undertaken.

4. The training and hiring of Indigenous teachers are vital to the education of Indigenous peoples, particularly given that these are the people who master and can teach in the mother tongue of each of the communities they are assigned to work with. To this end, it is necessary that Indigenous people complete their primary and secondary education, and undertake higher education that qualifies them as teachers. This should include differentiated and ongoing training required by Indigenous teachers. In addition, each country should include in their curricula specific subjects on native languages and interculturalism.
5. The educational curricula for Indigenous education must be based on the context and worldview of each Indigenous community, engaging in dialog related to human rights, the equality of all people, and the legal and constitutional framework of each respective country. The use of the mother tongue of each Indigenous community is central to decolonizing educational curricula. Women, young people and the LGBTQI+ population in Indigenous communities must have a voice and presence in the process of building inclusive and regionalized Indigenous curricula.
6. Promotion of the participation of Indigenous women in all decision-making and political advocacy forums must occur, employing strategies of parity and alternation. The rights of Indigenous women and girls continue to be unevenly recognized; it is necessary to deepen the fight against gender-based violence and the exclusion of women from education and the labor force.
7. Indigenous education workers should receive fair remuneration that is equivalent to the salaries negotiated by trade union organizations in collective labour agreements. The rights of Indigenous educators to decent working conditions and job stability must be enforced.
8. Educational institutions must be built in all territories with the conditions required to carry out teaching and learning processes under equal conditions. Such institutions must have the infrastructure and equipment necessary to excellent teaching practices and learning processes, including access to basic public services such as potable water, electricity and high-speed internet. Permanent nutritional services and health and psychological care must also be provided.



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9. In Latin America, only 33% of schools have access to internet of adequate speeds, with this reaching less than 15% of schools in rural areas. It is vital that Indigenous students be given access to technological tools and training in their use to counter the growing digital and technological gap affecting Indigenous peoples and rural communities.
10. As education workers, we reaffirm the urgency of combating the increasing privatization and commercialization of education, which has a direct impact on the exclusion and expulsion of Indigenous students from educational systems. Since 2011, the Latin American Pedagogical Movement (MPL for the initials in Spanish) has warned that educational reforms continue to neglect the multi-ethnic and multicultural rural sectors of our communities. Education has ceased to be thought of as a social right, and instead is seen as a commercial service that can be accessed only by sectors of the public with the resources to pay for it, at the same time that states transfer resources to the private sector for the provision of this educational "service".
11. A decolonization of Indigenous educational curricula must occur that fights against a "hierarchy" of knowledge and beliefs, accompanied by the decolonization of educational funding. Countries must ensure sustainable and sovereign public education budgets that are free from external interference from financial entities motivated by profit that seek to influence educational curricula.
12. Education unions value having access to digital technology as a complement to teaching in classrooms. Technology should be a tool that does not replace human beings. In addition, we demand that our countries act to close gaps in connectivity and quality internet access. Technological advances, the implementation of educational technology platforms and future uses of artificial intelligence (AI) in education should all follow guidelines that protect inclusion and human rights, and which also ensure these represent the diversity of Indigenous educational communities.
13. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is not free of racism, sexism and colonialism given that it is often programmed with biased data. Education unions therefore demand the standardization and regulation of AI by means of public policies that correct these forms of discrimination and invisibility in the development of technology



through the use of data that is inclusive of Indigenous peoples and by ensuring that said technologies exist in all our languages.

14. It is vital that the trade union movement intensifies its strategies aimed at organizing and representing Indigenous peoples.
15. We urge each of the organizations affiliated to Education International Latin America to undertake actions within their Executive Committees that promote the affiliation and organization of Indigenous education workers in order to favor the proposal of public educational policy for these populations.

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EILA and its affiliates:

- Magisterio Panameño Unido (MPU)
- Organización de Trabajadores de la Educación del Paraguay-Auténtica (OTEP-A)
- Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Educación de Guatemala (STEG)
- Colegio Profesional Superación Magisterial Hondureño (COLPROSUMAH)
- Confederación Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación de Brasil (CNTE)
- Sindicato Unitario de Trabajadores en la Educación del Perú (SUTEP)
- Asociación Nacional de Educadores y Educadoras (ANDE)
- Sindicato de Trabajadores y Trabajadores de la Educación Costarricenses (SEC)
- Confederación Nacional de Maestros de Educación Rural de Bolivia (CONMERB)
- Confederación de Trabajadores de la Educación Urbana de Bolivia (CTEUB)

support the demands of Indigenous peoples and emphasize the fundamental importance of the struggle of education trade unions in favor of education and decent working conditions for Indigenous educators.

In addition, EILA calls on the other member organizations in the region to commit themselves to defending and complying with the rights of Indigenous peoples, and to facilitate and promote their integration into trade union structures.