



Americas Policy Group

Action Plan for 2016-2017

Americas Policy Group

The Americas Policy Group (APG) is a Canadian civil society policy group focused on development and social justice issues in the Americas. It brings together approximately forty international development and humanitarian NGOs, human rights groups, labour unions, research institutions, church and solidarity groups.

Mandate

The APG's mandate is to provide a space for collective reflection and the articulation of coordinated policy positions, as well as dialogue and advocacy with the Canadian government, other governments, and other decision-making bodies. In fulfilling this mandate, the APG works to:

- Monitor, share and document member and partner experience and analysis on development and human rights issues in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- Enhance the capacity of members to undertake policy work concerning the Americas.
- Participate collectively in relevant international networks.
- Ensure dialogue and action on Americas policy issues at CCIC.

The APG and its member organizations have a history of active collaboration with Central and South American civil society organizations. Many of our members participate in regular missions to the region, others have permanent field staff, and all have regular contact with local policy analysts and human rights activists.

Preliminary Action Plan for fiscal year from April 2016 to March 2017

In the coming year, the APG will continue to bring a human rights lens to major areas of Canadian foreign policy towards the Americas such as trade, democratic governance, and security.

The work plan consists of four broad activity areas. The main activities of the APG are:

1. Coordination and communications
2. Advocacy and mobilization
3. Research and analysis
4. Learning Events

1. Coordination and communications

A - Coordination

APG bi-annual meetings

APG members will have two face-to-face meetings this year. The first meeting took place in Montreal on April 4th and 5th, 2016. The second meeting will be held in Ottawa on October 3rd and 4th, 2016.

It will seek to organize meetings in different cities in order to enable participation from members in various regions.

APG Steering committee

The Steering Committee helps guide the political and strategic orientation of the Americas Policy Group (APG) and supports the Regional Working Group Officer with ideas and feedback between meetings. The Steering Committee is composed of two co-chairs, a treasurer and a member at large. The co-chairs are responsible for chairing APG's bi-annual meetings and ensuring that they run effectively and efficiently. They also sign off on official APG letters.

Composition of the Steering Committee for this year

Steering Committee members commit to a two-year term. Elections were held in November 2015. The Steering committee is composed of the following members:

Rachel Vincent, co-chair
Jim Hodgson, co-chair
Bill Fairbairn, treasurer
Steve Stewart, member
Julia Sanchez, member

**Jim Hodgson's term as co-chair ends in the summer of 2016; he will be succeeded by Steve Stewart.

Working Groups new structure

Previously, each working group was under the coordination of a part-time CCIC employee. However, two main reasons led to the revision of this model. First, the temporary employee and part-time status contributed to the uncertainty and variability and has resulted in high turnover rates for the positions of each working group coordinator. Second, the funding cuts has meant more precarious working situation for staff. Following consultations with CCIC's members, a new structure for the coordination of the Working Groups was adopted. Two full time staff people are now coordinating the three working groups.

Regional Working Group Officer

The Regional Working Group Officer is responsible for coordinating and convening the activities of the three CCIC's working groups. She works with Working Group members to implement the action plan of each group and perform related activities and tasks.

Regional Working Group Program Assistant

The Program Assistant is responsible for administrative and logistical working group support, as well as assisting with communications and research in order to ensure effective and efficient operations.

Opportunities and challenges of the new structure

We hope this new structure will allow more synergy among the three working groups, stimulating cooperation in organizing collective activities, dialogue and research projects. The possible challenges of the new model include tensions around sharing a resource person, the risk of losing the identity of each working group and the possible lack of time from the Regional Working Group Officer to produce research and policy work. APG members suggested to have a first evaluation of this new model six months after the Regional Working Group Officer took office (scheduled for mid-August 2016).

B - Communications

APG members use CUPE mailing lists to communicate. Contrary to the two other working groups, APG doesn't have a newsletter. The possibility of sharing a newsletter with the other working groups will be submitted to the APG members and a decision will be taken following this consultation.

APG members also suggested the creation of an electronic shared calendar where major activities, events and travels would be featured in order to better coordinate collective actions.

2. Advocacy and mobilization

General areas of focus

Roles, capacity and limitations: There is a consensus that APG does not have the capacity to coordinate all the members' projects and that APG should focus on the advocacy work in Ottawa, the political links and pressure on federal government. The Regional Working Group Officer will facilitate the coordination of the working group and among members but members are called to convene country group meetings and contribute to policy work. APG can work in partnership with other groups like Colombia Working Group or Common Frontiers where members show an interest and when there is a capacity to do so. Currently, there are two APG subgroups: Mesoamerica and Colombia.

Women, Peace and Security

Support the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development's study on Women, Peace and Security.

World Social Forum in Montreal

The World Social Forum, an international gathering for civil society organizations, will take place in Montreal from August 9 to 14, 2016. APG will not coordinate a specific participation in the forum but APG members will participate individually. Regional Working Group officer will facilitate information sharing and networking among APG members and with the two other working groups.

a) Latin American counterparts visits to Canada

Alfredo Molano (journalist and expert on peace process in Colombia) was in Canada from April 29 to May 6. Regional Working Group Officer coordinated with Common Frontiers and organized a Brown-Bag Lunch.

Sandra Moran (Member of Parliament in Guatemala) is coming to Canada in June. Mrs. Moran facilitated women's participation to the peace process in her home country. APG will coordinate meetings with Canadian MPs, GAC officials or NGOs.

Regional areas of focus

Mesoamerica

a) Honduras: Human Rights crisis following the killing of Berta Cáceres

On March 3rd, the Coordinator and co-founder of COPINH Bertha Cáceres was assassinated in her home. This has a lot to do with her key role in the opposition to the building of the Agua Zarca

dam on the Gualcarque River, traditional Lenca territory. Mexican environmentalist Gustavo Castro was left for dead but survived the attack. On March 14, Nelson Garcia, another COPINH member, was shot dead as he was coming back from peaceful demonstration.

March and April 2016 actions for Honduras

Following the assassination of Berta Caceres in March 2016, APG sent a letter to Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs asking Canada to call for an independent investigation into this case and to use all diplomatic means to pressure government of Honduras to respect human rights and protect legal activists. Mining Watch, Amnesty International Canada and other APG members helped set up a Canadian civil society delegation to Honduras. The delegation composed of First Nation leaders, human rights activists and journalists went to Honduras from April 14 to 19. Upon their return, APG, with the help of the Regional Working Group Officer, facilitated meetings with Members of Parliament and Global Affairs officials. A press conference was held on April 21 and resulted in a good media coverage of the issue. A brief was also prepared by Mining Watch.

North American Leader Summit and human rights violations in Mexico

According to official figures, the whereabouts of more than 27 000 people remain unknown, half of them reported disappeared under the administration of President Pena Nieto. In the case of the enforced disappearance of the 43 Ayotzinapa students, the Mexican government's failure to carry out a serious and impartial investigation has been well documented. What has changed since 2013 is the growth of groups and movements of families of the disappeared – they are becoming stronger and more visible actors across the country. It is very important for APG to support this movement, echo their demands, and create opportunities for their voices to be heard.

Canada is expected to welcome the “3 Amigos” summit in June 2016. Giving the importance of the event and the expected media coverage, APG proposes to coordinate different actions to draw attention to human rights violations in Mexico and the negative impacts of trade on human rights and environmental issues.

- Develop media and social media strategy prior to the summit (proposed by Amnesty International)
- Connect murdered and missing Indigenous women in Canada with what is happening in terms of human rights violations in Mexico.
- Try to get Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to meet with family members of the disappeared from Mexico.

Colombia

a) **Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement and Human Rights report**

The new federal government decided to hold “informal” consultations in Montreal, Toronto and Ottawa prior to the release of the Canada-Colombia Free Trade agreement and human rights report in May 2016 in Parliament. The original goal of this annual report was to make sure the FTA had no detrimental effect on human rights in Colombia but previous reports tabled by former conservative government fell short on this goal. The following APG actions were recommended:

- APG letter to GAC officials to summarize our verbal input and content of written submissions re CCOFTA. Include where funding should be going to strengthen human rights in Colombia.
- Send letter to Minister of International Trade, Chrystia Freeland to share HR input related to CCOFTA and repeat request for meeting – propose that HR reporting be done differently.
- Develop public strategy around the release of the report: emphasize need to support peace process (especially support to civil society) while sharing our input re HR and CCOFTA: free trade as impediment of peace process.

3. Research and analysis

- a) **Security:** Research on Canada’s security funding to Central America and Mexico (proposed by Laura McDonald and students)
- b) **Criminalization of human rights activists in Mesoamerica:** Prepare a concept note or a brief on criminalization of human rights and environmental activists in the region. It has been suggested that Mesoamerica group look into this and develop a proposal for APG to look at. It is proposed to include the right to water, free prior and informed consent and link it to Canadian company projects in the region.
- c) **Colombia FTA and Human Rights:** Prepare a mapping on the issue that will include the various reports that were sent in the context of the Canadian government consultation. To have this report ready for the release of the FTA and Human Rights government report on May 15th.

4. Learning events

APG organize on a regular basis Brown-Bag Lunches and webinars on different issues. The learning events are led by APG members or partners in the Americas. The Regional Working Group Officer and Program Assistant are supporting the organization of learning events.