Dear Latin American, Caribbean and European Union leaders,

At the forthcoming summit between the European Union (EU) and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) on 17-18 July in Brussels, Amnesty International urges both sides to prioritize human rights across all areas of their relations at a critical time for the two regions. After an eight-year hiatus since the last CELAC-EU summit in 2015, many human rights concerns persist as new challenges emerge – decision-makers must now urgently act to promote and protect human rights in both regions and worldwide.

Any outcomes and commitments from the EU-CELAC summit must at the very minimum:

- Urgently address the most pressing human rights issues facing both continents today – including:
  - Human rights defenders (HRDs) and civil society space
  - The rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and to peaceful protest
  - The human rights of refugees and migrants
  - Violence and discrimination against women and girls
  - Defence of human rights gains and the international human rights system
- Publicly outline strategic and concrete steps to ensure that human rights remain at the heart of LAC-EU relations and are mainstreamed throughout all areas of relations, from trade to digital and climate change, up to highest level.
- Affirm the importance of HRDs and civil society – including the right to peaceful protest – in EU-LAC relations, in policy and practice, starting with the summit itself.

HRDs AND CIVIL SOCIETY SPACE

The Americas continue to be the most dangerous region in the world for the defence of human rights, as human rights and environmental defenders face serious violence, from killings to criminalization and persecution by their own states. Despite the EU and member state commitments to protect HRDs and promote their work in EU foreign policy, HRDs (in particular those assisting refugees and migrants) are criminalized in EU member states while civil society space is actively being closed by their policy and practice. This inconsistency stands in glaring contradiction to the EU’s human rights commitments and undermines the credibility and legitimacy of its external action on human rights. The current negotiation of EU legislation on strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) will be one crucial opportunity to achieve the highest possible level of protection for those defending rights within the EU.

At a time when the defence of human rights and civil society space are ever more under attack worldwide, the EU and LAC must join efforts in expanding civil society space, promoting and protecting HRDs and the important work they do.

LAC and EU states should act to:

- Guarantee the right to defend human rights, including ensuring that people engaged in journalism, human rights defenders and those considered political opponents can carry out their work and exercise their rights in a safe and enabling environment without harassment, violence or unlawful targeted surveillance.
- Take robust measures to uphold civil society space, repealing and/or amending any restrictive legislation and instead acting to ensure the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association in policy and practice.
- Immediately put in place a moratorium on the sale, transfer, and use of spyware technologies, as well as imposing an immediate ban on the most highly invasive types of spyware. Given the breadth and scale of the findings which emerged from the Pegasus Project, there is an urgent need for states on both continents to halt surveillance technology enabled activities of all states and companies, until there is a human rights-compliant regulatory framework in place.
THE RIGHTS TO FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY AND TO PEACEFUL PROTEST

In the EU and in the LAC region, recent years have seen thousands of people taking to the streets and exercising their right to peaceful protest to demand accountability from their states and the protection of their rights. However, in many cases, state responses have been repressive in an attempt to silence legitimate demands. The right to freedom of peaceful assembly remains at risk in both regions, including by the increasing criminalization of the right to protest as well as intimidation, harassment, violence, the excessive use of force and the unlawful use of lethal and less-lethal weapons by law enforcement against those who protest. Racialised and/or marginalised groups and individuals have seen their right to protest severely impacted by disproportionate and discriminatory policing of protests by law enforcement across both regions.

LAC and EU states should act to:

- End all violations of the rights to life, physical integrity, personal freedom and fair trial of people who express their dissatisfaction with government policies.
- Ensure that everyone can exercise the right to peaceful assembly and protest and that any force deployed by law enforcement or security officials when policing demonstrations is necessary, legitimate and strictly proportionate.
- Find ways to engage in dialogue with those on their territory so that their legitimate demands can be addressed.

THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS

Humanitarian and human rights crises worldwide have forced ever more people to flee their home countries in search of protection in EU and LAC countries. Restrictive migration and asylum policies predominate in both regions along with recurring militarization of borders in the LAC region and inhuman pushbacks, use of prolonged and excessive force, deterrence and externalisation policies in the EU and around its borders. As a consequence, people in need of protection are exposed to high rates of violence, discrimination and racism. At the same time, the continuing enactment of measures aimed at criminalizing search and rescue NGOs trying to fill the gap left by EU member states, compounded by the striking lack of safe and legal pathways to access protection, only makes migratory routes more dangerous and has a chilling effect on civil society.

Authorities in EU and LAC regions must act to:

- Ensure that people in need of international protection have access to safe and legal pathways to enter their territory and to exercise their right to asylum.
- Cease all unlawful, summary forced returns and other abuses inside countries in both regions and at their borders, granting the right to effective remedy to people who have been exposed to these and other violations.
- Create conditions for independent monitoring of the situation at the borders to prevent abuses and ensure accountability for refugees and migrants who have been victims of violations.
- Refrain from detaining refugees and migrants, and from abusively invoking emergency measures and derogations from national and international protection standards which would pose severe human rights concerns, undermine the right to asylum and potentially cause a dangerous weakening of international standards. Instead, states should focus on increasing compliance with standards that are already in force with a view to building functioning and humane asylum and reception systems.
- Pro-actively make space for civil society in policymaking on asylum and migration, support migrant rights defenders and repeal, amend and refrain from adopting measures which hinder and criminalise rescue operations and humanitarian assistance by civil society actors.
- Jointly and publicly affirm their commitment to the human rights of refugees and migrants within and at the borders of the LAC and EU regions.

VIOLENCE AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Gender-based violence remains one of the major human rights challenges on both continents. States in both regions continue to fail to adequately address very high levels of gender-based violence. The EU and its member states stand at a crossroads with a Directive to combat violence against women and domestic violence currently under negotiation that could strengthen protection and guarantee the existing obligations under the Istanbul Convention as a minimum standard - an unprecedented opportunity to take effective action against violence against women across the EU. As the EU and its member states move forward with the ratification and implementation of the Istanbul Convention, the EU and its member states should complement these efforts by ensuring the strongest possible protection against gender-based and domestic
violence in this new Directive. In the Americas, rates of sexual violence against women and girls continue to rise, with Indigenous women being disproportionately affected\textsuperscript{xviii}; at the same time, hundreds of feminicides and femicides continue to be recorded in the region.\textsuperscript{xix}

In both regions, legal restrictions to abortion\textsuperscript{xx} violate women’s sexual and reproductive rights, their right to health and their very right to life, even as women’s rights and human rights defenders acting for safe and legal abortions are coming under attack in EU member states.\textsuperscript{xxi}

EU and LAC states should act to:

• Urgently address all forms of gender-based violence, and conduct meaningful, thorough and impartial investigations into feminicides and femicides, in order to bring those responsible for these crimes to justice and ensure that guarantees of non-repetition are put in place.

DEFENCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS GAINS AND THE INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS SYSTEM

Recent years have seen a sustained pushback on human rights and a widening crackdown on those who defend them, both in individual states and regions as well as at multi-lateral fora.

As “natural partners”, LAC and EU states have the potential to jointly champion universal human rights across the globe and should act to:

• Step up collaboration in defence of the international human rights system and the universality of human rights by forging truly global partnerships, at multi-lateral fora and worldwide.
• Build on the well-established cooperation between the EU and the UN Group of Latin America and Caribbean Countries (GRULAC) to make the most of opportunities for ambitious exchanges and partnerships on key human rights issues at multi-lateral level, in particular at UN human rights fora.\textsuperscript{xxii}
• Provide full political backing and full funding for the Inter-American Human Rights System, encompassing both the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, ensuring the election of commissioners and judges with the highest credentials.

At this crucial time for human rights and rights defenders, we welcome your concerted action for human rights in your cooperation, across both regions, and worldwide.

Yours sincerely,

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See European Commission, Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council, A New Agenda for Relations between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean, 7 June 2023, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52023JC0017. The Joint Communication refers to EU and LAC as “natural partners… united by unique historical and cultural links, deep economic and social ties and a joint commitment to peace and multilateralism… [an] enduring partnership is built on shared values and mutual interests” (p. 1) and asserts that “[d]emocracy and human rights are at the heart of the EU-LAC partnership” (p. 15). Yet the European Council Conclusions of 30 June (https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/65398/2930-06-23-eu-co-conclusions-en.pdf) make absolutely no mention of human rights ahead of the EU-CELAC summit, refering solely to “a partnership based on shared values, history and culture” and goals of “ensur[ing] the follow-up and implementation of concrete actions in areas of common interest… addressing together the global climate and environmental crises, rising inequalities, the opportunities of digital transformation… as well as unprecedented threats to global security and the rules-based order.”


For the Anti-SLAPP Directive to be truly effective, it is crucial that this legislation:

• provides a broad personal scope encompassing the full, diverse range of SLAPP victims
• includes strong mechanisms to obtain the early dismissal of SLAPPs
• provides security for costs, award of costs and damages on the defendant’s side, and
• imposes penalties against those initiating SLAPPs.


* For the EU, see Amnesty International, Morocco: They beat him in the head, to check if he was dead*: Evidence of crimes under international law by Morocco and Spain at the Melilla border, 23 December 2022, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur30/6249/2022/en/.


* In 2022, the Venezuelan NGO CEPAZ documented 282 femicides and 120 attempted femicides in the country, amounting to one femicide or attempted every 26 hours (CEPAZ, Observatorio Digital de Femicidios de Cepaz: En el 2022 hubo 37 femicidios de niñas en Venezuela, 6 April 2023, https://ce paz.org/noticias/observatorio-digital-de-femicidios-de-cepaz-en-el-2022-hubo-37-femicidios-de-ninas-en-venezuela). According to the National Registry of Femicides of the Argentine Justice (Registro Nacional de Femicidios de la Justicia Argentina), a femicide occurred every 35 hours in the country in 2022, https://om.csjn.gob.ar/consultaTalleresWeb/public/documentoConsulta?documentoById=170. According to the Center of Women’s Rights (Centro de Derechos de las Mujeres), 297 femicides took place in Honduras in 2022 (https://derechosdelamujer.org/proyecto/2022/). In Mexico, official data from the Executive Secretariat of the National System of Public Security (Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad...
Pública), there were 3755 killings of women in 2022, of which 954 were investigated as femicides (https://drive.google.com/file/d/1zXPiFVXe6%5CxsZ1mhm4H-TdF_bGTrK/view?pli=1).


See European Commission, A New Agenda for Relations between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean, 2-4.