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To the attn. of:

Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) and European Union (EU) leaders

6 November 2025

Dear Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) and European Union (EU) leaders,

MOVING FROM SHARED VALUES TO ACTION: HUMAN RIGHTS MUST PREVAIL AT EU-CELAC SUMMIT

At the forthcoming summit between the European Union and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean states (CELAC) on 9 November 2025, Amnesty International urges you to seize the opportunity to move beyond rhetoric on long-standing partnership and shared values and interests[†] to take concrete actions on human rights in both regions and worldwide, at a crucial time when human rights are under attack globally.

At the last EU-CELAC summit from 17-18 July 2023, both sides jointly declared that their partnership is based on "shared values", including the "promotion, protection and respect of all human rights", and affirmed the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of all rights, highlighting commitments to work toward gender equality, promote the rights of human rights defenders and other specific groups and enhance cooperation and coordination in relevant multilateral fora on issues of common interest, including human rights."

Even as the two regions deepen their regular high-level strategic engagement with summits every two years, human rights are ever more embattled, and authoritarian practices have proliferated in Europe, Latin America and across the globe. These increasing authoritarian practices amplify existing human rights issues in both regions, among others:

- The repression of human rights defenders and civil society, and challenges to judicial independence
- Crackdowns on the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, as well as the right to protest
- Erosion of gains on women's and girls' rights
- Rollback of refugee and migrant rights
- The active undermining of international human rights bodies and commitments, including attacks on international justice.

At the same time, both LAC and EU leaders are challenged to respond meaningfully to mounting humanitarian and human rights crises within their respective regions and worldwide, including in Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Haiti, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Sudan, Ukraine and Venezuela.ⁱⁱⁱ In parallel, recent abrupt cuts in foreign assistance from the United States of America (USA), combined with additional cuts from other donor states, have gravely undermined cooperation at the foundation of the post-World War II multilateral system, and exacerbated harms against populations already in vulnerable situations across the globe.^{iv}

For a decade or more, the world has witnessed a steady spread of authoritarian laws, policies and practices, shrinking civic space and erosion of the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association. Current global trends include violations of international humanitarian law during armed conflicts, repression of dissent, discrimination and the dissemination of xenophobic and racist narratives, economic and climate injustices, and the misuse of technology to infringe on human rights. These trends will only be exacerbated in the longer term, as states actively undermine the international rules-based system and authoritarian practices spread across different continents, reversing hard-won human rights gains achieved by human rights defenders, activists, civil society and states worldwide.

This summit will be a crucial opportunity to respond to new and ongoing human rights challenges and to act to promote and protect human rights in both regions and worldwide. Decision-makers from the EU and LAC regions should jointly adopt concrete, strategic steps to ensure that human rights remain at the heart of their partnership and are mainstreamed throughout all their action, from trade to digital and climate change, up to highest level.

At a time of mounting crises and pushback against human rights, LAC and EU leaders must seize this moment to unequivocally affirm the important role of rights defenders and civil society, and ensure joint decision-making promotes their work and takes their views into account, at the summit and beyond.

Yours sincerely,

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HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE EU AND LAC REGIONS

Human rights defenders and civil society

Both LAC and EU states are challenged to effectively protect and support human rights defenders (HRDs) and civil society, and advance their important work.

The Americas continue to be dangerous for human rights defenders who face crimes under international law as well as human rights violations, including arbitrary detention, defamatory campaigns, enforced disappearances, forced displacement, illegal surveillance, killings, threats, torture and unfair trials. Across the region, the most vulnerable human rights defenders belong to particular groups, such as women, Afro-descendants, Indigenous persons and LGBTIQ+ people. Women searching for disappeared persons also face high levels of risk. Land, territory and environmental defenders remain at particular risk of attacks and harassment by both state authorities and non-state actors a governments fail to guarantee adequate protection mechanisms for human rights defenders.

Amnesty International is calling for the release of five prisoners of conscience simultaneously in different countries in Central America^{viii}, the highest number in over two decades, and a stark reflection of a broader regional pattern.^{ix} An increasing number of people in the LAC region – in Central America and beyond – are being imprisoned for political reasons - whether for their activism, for exercising their right to protest, or simply for expressing dissenting views. Critical voices are silenced through arbitrary detention and other forms of unfair criminalization. Together, these cases reveal a systematic attempt across the region to use the justice system as a tool of repression and intimidation against those who dare to challenge state power.

The European Union has seen a concerning trend across the continent evidenced by increased rights violations and diminished respect for the rule of law. Rights defenders and civil society organizations have faced increasing threats from smear campaigns. Depending on the country and varying over time, LGBTIQ+ defenders, those supporting refugees and migrants, anti-racism activists, and environmental defenders are among those most targeted.xi

Civil society organisations in Europe have been calling for the development of a protection mechanism for human rights defenders within the EU. Xii While the EU has a range of instruments at its disposal to support HRDs outside the EU, most notably the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders, no such thing exists within the EU itself. The creation of such a mechanism will strengthen the protection of civil society, activists and human rights defenders within the EU, and also achieve greater coherence with and lend increased credibility and legitimacy to, the EU's foreign policy action in support of civic space and HRDs.

Recommendations to EU and LAC states:

- Urgently act to ensure that human rights defenders and civil society are able to carry out their important work safely and without fear of reprisals.
- Take the opportunity of this summit to build on their 2023 commitment to "promot[e] human rights defenders" and to jointly and publicly express concerns about the global shrinking of civic space, commend the work of civil society and human rights defenders in both regions, and stress the critical importance of preserving a safe, free and open space for their programmes and activities. xiv
- Redouble funding and diplomatic support for human rights defenders and independent civil society in the LAC region, countering mounting backtracking on foreign assistance by key donors worldwide.
- The EU and its member states should establish a structured, coordinated, holistic and adequately resourced system to ensure the safety, well-being and operational capacity of civil society actors and rights defenders within the EU itself. A holistic protection ecosystem must strengthen institutional protection duties across governance levels, and enhance civil society resilience and solidarity mechanisms.

Rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly and the right to protest

In a concerning and growing trend, civic space - as an intersection of the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly - remains under threat by governments in both regions since the last EU-CELAC summit in 2023.



In both Europe and the Americas, governments continue their efforts to control, restrict or close down civil society space, including with repressive legislation increasing control over non-governmental organizations and leading to arbitrary restrictions, including closure and criminal proceedings.**

In the Americas, the right to freedom of expression was at risk due to attacks and harassment against the media, with a number of these attacks resulting in violent deaths^{xvi}; female journalists experienced digital violence, including sexual harassment.^{xvii} Journalists have been criminalized and stigmatized by state authorities in both the EU and LAC countries.^{xviii}

At the same time, governments in both regions obstructed and repressed peaceful protests with law enforcement interventions^{xix} and new, restrictive policies and practices obstructing the right to protest, highlighting the advancing deterioration of civic space.^{xx} Lack of accountability for human rights violations during protests and other political repression continues across both regions^{xxi} with only few exceptions to date.^{xxii}

Unlawful surveillance and other privacy violations continued in both regions, with mass surveillance through facial recognition and other technologies^{xxiii} as well as reporting applications^{xxiv} and unlawful surveillance with spyware such as Pegasus.^{xxv}

Amnesty International research on the right to protest in 21 European countries revealed a continent-wide pattern of repressive laws, use of unnecessary or excessive force, arbitrary arrests and prosecutions, unwarranted or discriminatory restrictions as well as the increasing use of invasive surveillance technology, resulting in a systematic rollback of the right to protest.xxvi

Instead of respecting, protecting and facilitating people's right to peacefully assemble, authorities across Europe are deliberately stigmatising, impeding, deterring and punishing people who protest, with human rights defenders often particularly targeted for their role as organizers. Amnesty International has documented repeated and systematic civic space restrictions against those expressing solidarity with the Palestinian people.xxviii The element of transnational repression, where governments outside the EU are targeting their nationals exiled in the EU, is also an increasing concern.xxviii

Recommendations to LAC and EU states:

• Act to protect civic space, repealing laws and practices that hinder the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, and prohibiting unlawful surveillance by state and private actors.

Rights of women and girls

In their 2023 joint declaration, EU and LAC states committed to "fighting multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and gender-based violence, and to promoting... gender equality."xxix Both LAC and EU states are challenged to do more to end rape and gender-based violence.

In the Americas, femicide continues unabated and unpunished throughout the region, with alarming numbers reported but with states failing to implement existing legislation on femicide or lacking legislation making femicide a specific criminal offence.xxx

Gender-based violence, including sexual violence and domestic violence, continues to be a problem across the EU as well.xxxii While important action was taken by the EU, such as ratifying the Istanbul Convention, adopting the Directive (EU) 2024/1385 (4) on combating violence against women and domestic violencexxxiii, and including combating gender-based violence as a priority in the EU Roadmap for Women's Rights, much remains to be done.xxiii

At the same time, sexual and reproductive rights remain under threat in both regions. Several LAC countries have introduced laws or policies reducing access to reproductive health services veven as access to abortion continues to be hindered in law and practice veve, disproportionately affecting people facing intersecting forms of discrimination.

Over the past decade, there have been major strides in advancing abortion rights across Europe, with laws changing for the better in several European countries. However, legal reforms alone don't tell the whole picture. In practice, access to abortion is far from a reality for everyone. Even in countries with positive legislative and policy reforms, medically unjustified requirements, refusals of care based on personal beliefs, a shortage of trained professionals, gestational time limits and high costs persist_with marginalised groups bearing the brunt. Moreover, the continued



criminalization of abortion adds to stigma and undermines the treatment of abortion as essential healthcare and as a human right.

Recommendations to EU and LAC states:

- Take urgent and concrete steps to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence, working to end impunity for violent crimes against women and girls.
- Work to guarantee access to safe abortion and other sexual and reproductive rights, lending specific support for protection, care, treatment and support mechanisms for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.
- EU member states should urgently transpose and implement the EU Directive on violence against women and domestic violence and use this opportunity to go beyond minimum standards and realise the highest standards across the EU.

Refugee and migrant rights

Both LAC and EU states continue to fall short in delivering on their commitments to protect those fleeing persecution, human rights violations, insecurity and the adverse effects of climate change and to effectively fulfil the rights of refugees and migrants on their territory and at their borders.

Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers faced xenophobia and racism in both regions, while United Nations (UN) entities and regional organizations have voiced human rights concerns about state responses to migration, including on externalization of migration policy, militarization of borders, the denial of asylum and deportation without due process.xxxvii

In both regions, refugees and migrants face legal and bureaucratic obstacles to exercising their rights xxxviii, while they are exposed to harassment, threats and violence. XXXIIX

Both EU and LAC states are currently increasing restrictions on access to protection and advancing the externalisation of asylum and migration policy, including proposals by the EU to enable forced returns or deportations to countries to which people have no meaningful link, or the establishment of so-called 'return hubs' in countries outside the EU.

Recommendations to LAC and EU states:

- Cease unlawful deportations and the unlawful denial of access to asylum, and respect the principle of *non-refoulement*.
- Abandon policies and practices that restrict access to protection and advance the externalisation of asylum and migration policy.
- Pro-actively combat racism and xenophobia and guarantee all internationally recognized rights to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, in policy and in practice.

International human rights bodies and commitments

The UN human rights system and its mechanisms play a crucial role in both preventing and responding to today's growing threats and challenges to human rights. As human rights crises multiply and deepen across the globe, this system provides essential scrutiny over serious human rights violations and crimes under international law. It serves as a critical safeguard against impunity, injustice and mounting authoritarian practices, while supporting the protection of human rights, global stability and sustainable development.

Yet today, unprecedented forces seek to challenge the universality of human rights – aiming to weaken or even dismantle the international system entirely. Indeed, the UN's 80th anniversary takes place as the proliferation of armed conflicts continues to devastate the lives of millions of people and expose civilians to some of the most egregious crimes under international law, including war crimes and possible crimes against humanity in Sudan^{xl}, war crimes and crimes against humanity in Ukraine^{xli} and the ongoing genocide against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. Amid these developments, the United Nations human rights system faces increasing polarization, a financial and liquidity crisis,



and increasing state pushback against agreed human rights standards, in addition to attacks on the international criminal justice architecture.

Together, EU and LAC states must remain proactive and ambitious in their defence of international human rights standards and the broader international human rights system. Rather than retreating or lowering ambitions, they should work together toward principled positions and consistent action.

Recommendations to LAC and EU states:

- Jointly show leadership in defending international human rights standards and the international human rights system, remaining steadfast in the defence of all rights and their universality and indivisibility, including in the joint communique at the close of the summit.
- Firmly resist efforts to roll back established human rights standards, particularly with regard to women's human rights, sexual and reproductive health and rights, sexual orientation and gender identity as well as established commitments regarding the support and protection of human rights defenders and civil society.
- Unequivocally defend UN human rights mandates and mandate holders from attacks, including by decisively rejecting all attempts to undermine, delegitimize or impede their crucial work.
- Support international justice and the fight against impunity for crimes under international law, regardless of where they occur including steadfastly maintaining commitments to international justice in practice^{xliv}, and taking strong and decisive action to defend the independence of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and preserve its integrity from political interference.
- Jointly build on the developing consensus^{xiv} among states at the UN towards rejecting executions as a practice compatible with the protection of human rights and actively counter any attempts to invoke sovereignty to undermine or shield states from their international human rights obligations in relation to the death penalty.

^{xv} For LAC, see Amnesty International, <u>Americas: Proposed laws would severely restrict civil society's work in region</u>, 21 June 2024; <u>El Salvador: Criminal law reforms exacerbate human rights violations against children and adolescents</u>, 27 February 2025; <u>Nicaragua: the year ends with systematic repression and a streamlined state strategy against any form of dissent</u>, 17 December 2024; <u>Paraguay: Urgent Action on the threat to freedom of association</u>, 31 July 2024; <u>Amnesty Paraguay</u>, <u>PARAGUAY: Preocupaciones de Amnistía Internacional sobre el proyecto de ley "Que establece el control, la transparencia y la rendición de cuentas de las organizaciones sin fines de lucro" [Spanish only], 2024; <u>Peru: Enacted law</u></u>



[&]quot;Joint press release - Fourth CELAC-EU summit to take place on 9-10 November 2025," 9 April 2025.

ii <u>Declaration of the EU-CELAC summit 2023</u>, 18 July 2023. For Amnesty International's recommendations to the last EU-CELAC summit in 2023, see Amnesty International, <u>Open Letter: "Natural partners" at a crossroads: EU-CELAC summit must prioritize human rights</u>, 7 July 2023.

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v Amnesty International, Americas: Searching Without Fear: International Standards for protecting women searchers in the Americas, 29 August 2024; Colombia: Transforming pain into rights: Risks, threats and attacks on women searchers in Colombia, 3 December 2024; Mexico: Disappearing again: Violence and impacts experienced by women searchers in Mexico, 8 July 2025.

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vii Amnesty International, Americas: The Situation of State Protection Mechanisms for Human Rights Defenders, 3 October 2018.

viii Amnesty International, Guatemala: Amnesty International declares José Rubén Zamora a prisoner of conscience and demands his release, 1 August 2024; Nicaragua: Ortega's repressive machinery continues to stifle any dissent, 17 December 2024; El Salvador: Amnesty International declares Ruth Eleonora López, Alejandro Henríquez and José Ángel Pérez prisoners of conscience amid increasing repression, 1 July 2025.

ix See also Amnesty International, <u>Cuba: Amnesty International designates four persons as prisoners of conscience in the midst of a new wave of state repression</u>, 23 October 2024; <u>Venezuela: Further information: Free Venezuelan prisoners of conscience</u>, 26 February 2025.

^{*} European Civic Forum and Civic Space Watch, Civic Space Report 2025.

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xii Amnesty International with Civil Society Europe, the European Civic Forum and other civil society organizations, <u>A Protection Mechanism for Human Rights Defenders and Civil Society Organisations in Europe</u>, 8 October 2024.

xiii Declaration of the EU-CELAC summit 2023, paragraph 9.

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For the EU, see Amnesty International, Open letter: EU must take concrete action against Hungary's continued defiance of human rights and rule of law, 26 May 2025; Slovakia: Anti-NGO law a 'full-frontal assault on civil society', 30 April 2024.

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- xxviii See Amnesty International UK, <u>UK has 'become a hunting ground for authoritarian regimes'</u>, 30 July 2025; and Amnesty International, <u>Open letter: The EU must address the chilling effect of China's transnational repression on freedom of expression and academic freedoms of Chinese students, 15 May 2024.</u>
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