

ACT Alliance public statement on Gender Justice in Latin America and the Caribbean

As a Community of Practice on Gender Justice of the ACT Alliance and as churches and faith-based organizations (FBOs), with a long history of accompanying the most disadvantaged communities in Latin America and the Caribbean, we express our concern for the state of the rights of women and LGBTI communities in the region and for the situation that has broadened the gender inequality gap through the following regional tendencies:

1. Trends of Fundamentalism: In the last 15 years, all across the Americas, from Chile and Argentina in the south and to the USA in the north, there has been an increase in groups that promote messages incompatible with human rights, that create messages that undermine work for the rights of women, and campaigns of disinformation and distortion such as the concept of “gender ideology”. These movements act dynamically within regional and international spaces of civil society and have an impact on regional, national and international dynamics. They have a clear political agenda and have created alliances in many countries, on the left and the right, even in constitutionally secular states.ⁱ

2. Increasing Violence against Women: The Latin America and the Caribbean region has the highest rates of violence against women. The UN claims that, on average, 12 Latin American and Caribbean women are killed each day for the mere fact of being a woman. The region also has the highest rate of sexual violence towards women perpetrated by someone outside of their relationship and the second highest rate of violence caused by a spouse or partner. Honduras, Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Colombia head the list of countries with the greatest number of femicides in the region.ⁱⁱ

3. Poor Access to and Quality of Sexual and Reproductive Health Services have an impact on the fact that women of native and African descent have the highest rates of teenage pregnancy and maternal mortality. Furthermore, teenage pregnancy in Latin America and the Caribbean has not reduced proportionally with global levels. In fact, the UN estimates that these rates are the highest in the world and that they will remain stable between 2020 and 2100.ⁱⁱⁱ These figures do not include pregnancy amongst girls younger than 14 which are the product of rape, often perpetrated by their closest relatives.^{iv}

4. The LGBTI Population is the victim of serious violations of their human rights, particularly their right to life, liberty, integrity, equality, free association and freedom of expression. Trans people have become the most frequent victims of threats, torture and homicide. According to data from Transgender Europe, eight out of ten reported trans deaths occurred in our region. According to the same report, the average life expectancy of a trans woman in Latin America is 33 years.

5. Women are more vulnerable in migration: 70% of migration in Latin America is regional and is caused by social and economic factors and violence by criminal groups, the state and private companies.^v The most extreme situation can be seen in Central America and Venezuela where the principal victims are women, boys and girls exposed to great suffering. Also, in migration, there are high rates of sexual violence against women.

6. Feminization of Poverty: In the region, women in poverty benefit less from poverty reduction than their male counterparts. There is a significant increase of single-parent households headed by women, particularly low-income women. These households do not only possess a greater propensity to fall into poverty, but also the gender gap has increased. Women in the region still spend more than triple the amount of time that men

do on housework and other unpaid labor. This unfair assignment of labor limits opportunities for women in the region – opportunities for education, employment, political participation or rest and leisure. Although women are the ones chiefly responsible for working the earth only 17.8% of them own the land that they work on^{vi} which puts them at a disadvantage for land rights, nutrition and economic equality.

7. Low Rate of Women in the Workforce: Today in Latin America and the Caribbean, women comprise 26% less of the workforce than men, and female unemployment is 50% higher than that of men. The proportion of women who do not have their own income is twice that of men while the salary gap between genders persists even when women have greater levels of education.^{vii} Nearly half of female workers are employed informally in the region, which implies unstable employment, low income and a lack of rights and protection.^{viii}

8. Women More Affected by Climate Change: According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), climate change will affect the cultivation of crops which will impact local economies and compromise food security across the region. This phenomenon will especially affect women who, according to FAO, produce 60 to 80 percent of the food in developing countries and half of the food in all countries.

9. This reality will be aggravated by the **persecution of leading defenders of the environment and human rights** that live in the region. 116 people died in Latin American countries for defending their lands and confronting practices that affected the environment in 2017. Brazil heads the list in Latin America with 46 murders, followed by Colombia with 32, Mexico with 15 and Peru with 8.^{ix}

Recommendations and Call to Action:

From the Gender CoP, we know that in order to “leave no one behind”, we must act together to push back the inequality that affects women. Therefore, in order to help FBOs and churches reach the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda, which are a valuable tool for promoting a full life for all, we draw upon our work in ecumenical diakonia and call on FBOs and churches to:

1. Publically express and support rights-based positions against “gender ideology” and against electoral and political manipulations making use of religious sentiment.
2. Strengthen alliances and practices with churches and ecumenical and Christian organizations for LGBTI and women’s rights, from a theological perspective compatible with human rights based on love and inclusion.
3. Promote zero tolerance for violence against women and girls, denouncing and repudiating violence against women, girls and the LGBTI community by churches. Self-criticism is necessary given gender-related violence in churches who, in the discourse they use, occasionally promote a certain tolerance of violence within families,
4. Contribute to educating men and women about equitable distribution of responsibilities inside and outside the family environment to balance the division of labor that causes women to dedicate themselves disproportionately to unpaid housework.
5. Promote women’s leadership and participation in the community and in church environments.
6. Promote the exercise of masculinities that counteract the practices and behaviors that generate violence and inequality in society, especially, at the core of our congregations and communities of faith.

7. Convene inter-church dialogue, to make communities more aware of factors that generate high rates of teenage and child pregnancy as well as mortality and morbidity due to a failure to protect sexual and reproductive rights.
8. Accompany community leaders in exercising their human and environmental rights and being firmly committed to raising awareness about the risks that those who report the destruction of the environment face.
9. Strengthen the undertakings and initiatives of women and for the sustainable development of their families and communities.
10. Offer special welcome and attention to women of migrant communities and their families, not only through humanitarian aid but also in terms of spiritual and psycho-social support.

ⁱ In Colombia, these trends played an important role in the defeat of the peace referendum in September of 2016, advocating for No and asserting that the agreement promoted gender ideology. In Nicaragua, the socialist, solidary and Christian government of Daniel Ortega carried out heavy repressions against feminist student movements. In Honduras in April 2017, the evangelical and Catholic churches came together to support the criminalization of all forms of abortion. They influenced the revoking of the penal code that punished LGBTI hate-crimes and gender and sexual-orientation based discrimination. In Brazil, during the elections of this past October 7th, the candidate Jair Bolsonaro, representative of the Brazilian far-right, obtained 45% of the vote in the first round, which is worrying because of his racist, classist, misogynist and homophobic statements. This hateful discourse has generated a wave of violence and death for LGBT people.

ⁱⁱ Observatory of Gender Equality for Latin America from CEPAL [Observatorio de igualdad de género para América Latina de la CEPAL]

ⁱⁱⁱ Report: Experiences and Stories About Teenage Pregnancy [Informe: Vivencias y relatos sobre embarazo adolescente} PLAN-UNICEF 2014]

^{iv} Hemisphere Report on Sexual Violence and Child Pregnancy [[Informe hemisférico sobre violencia sexual y embarazo infantil en los Estados Parte de la Convención de Belém do Pará](#)]

^v Report on World Immigration 2018 [[Informe sobre las migraciones del mundo 2018. OIM.: https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/wmr_2018_sp.pdf](#)]

^{vi} Gender Landrights Database, FAO : <http://www.fao.org/gender-landrights-database/data-map/es/>

^{vii} Progress of Women in Latin America, 2017. Transforming Economies to Achieve Rights [el progreso de las mujeres en américa latina, 2017. Transformar las economías para realizar los derechos. ONU Mujeres.](#)

^{viii} Unemployment and Informality of Women In Latin America and the Carribean: A Key Challenge for the Future of Jobs http://www.ilo.org/americas/oficina-regional/direcci%C3%B3n-regional/WCMS_546522/lang-es/index.htm

^{ix} At What Cost? Irresponsible Businesses and the Murder of Environmental Activists in 2017. <https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/environmental-activists/a-qu%C3%A9-precio/>

ENDORSEMENTS OF FORUMS

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