



CUPE BC International Solidarity Committee Report to Convention – May 2019

CUPE BC's International Solidarity Committee continues to focus on issues of global justice with a mix of new and seasoned committee members for this term. The committee established an action plan at the One Big Committee meeting in October 2017, which includes the following:

- Promoting sanctuary cities with a focus on Sanctuary Schools.
- Participating in the Canadian Council for Corporate Accountability.
- Continue with ongoing support and participation in partnerships through CoDevelopment Canada.
- Reviewing the Colleen Jordan Humanity Fund commitments in conjunction with the CUPE BC Executive Board.
- Working to create partnerships with allied organizations in Palestine.

Our goal is to participate in creating equity within our movement and around the world. Workers face the same challenges throughout the world, and, in many places, advocating for the rights we have here in Canada may result in dire threats, and in some circumstances tragic outcomes.

The CUPE BC International Solidarity Committee is also focused on local issues that we, as front-line public sector workers, can address to create equity within our communities.

Sanctuary Schools

We know that basic services such as health care and education should be a fundamental human right. Unfortunately, this isn't the case for all, as even within our own communities these rights are not always provided.

We know that there are children not provided with schooling due to their parent's fear of deportation, even though the school act states "any child who is of school age and resides in that school district" must be enrolled. This is where we can help.

CUPE has over 26,000 members in the K-12 sector in BC, and CUPE BC can support the work of Sanctuary Schools to convince our School Boards to adopt Sanctuary Schools policies and ensure all children have access to education.

The CUPE BC International Solidarity Committee is looking to work with CUPE's Education Partners, such as the BC Teachers' Federation to further our goals.

Canadian Network for Corporate Accountability

The Canadian Network for Corporate Accountability (CNCA) was formed in 2005 to bring together environmental, human rights, religious, labour and solidarity groups from across Canada to ensure that Canadian mining, oil and gas companies respect human rights and the environment when working abroad.

CUPE BC joined the Canadian Network for Corporate Accountability as a result of a convention resolution.

After years of campaigning for greater corporate accountability, the Federal Government created a human rights ombudsperson position regarding the overseas operations of Canadian companies. Unfortunately, this position is not funded or filled. Work needs to be done to pressure the federal government to take action in this area.

CoDevelopment Canada

CUPE BC continues to partner with CoDevelopment Canada (CoDev) to support worker-to-worker projects in Colombia, Cuba, Nicaragua and Honduras. CUPE BC and our Latin American partners share a commitment to creating a fairer society that values people over profits, worker rights over corporate rights, and human rights for all. Our partners' achievements over the past year reflect those shared values.

Please see the CoDevelopment Canada report on our projects included with our report.

Aids Free World- Stephen Lewis

CUPE BC continues to support the work of Stephen Lewis with the Aids Free World organization. AIDS-Free World Canada works for a more just, urgent, and effective global response to HIV and AIDS.

The organization seeks targeted and broad alliances for effective, timely action on a range of issues related to HIV and AIDS, including stigma and discrimination, access to medicines, gender inequality, sexual violence, and disability.

CUPE Participation in Delegation to Israel – Palestine

In July, CoChair Andrew Ledger was part of CUPE's first education delegation to Israel-Palestine.

Our goals were to learn about the situation facing workers, to understand the impact of Israel's military occupation on Palestinians, and to hear how the Palestinian people have resisted repression and maintained the struggle for their land and self-determination for over 70 years.

The delegation traveled throughout Israel-Palestine, to large cities and many smaller communities including Khan al-Ahmar, a Bedouin community in the West Bank facing demolition. We met with activists and leaders in the labour movement, legal advocates, civil society and human rights activists, academics, Canadian government officials, and representatives of the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement.

With few exceptions, the message was clear and unequivocal. The Palestinian people live under a regime intent on displacing them from their land as the original indigenous inhabitants of the region.

A sophisticated system of segregation and discrimination is used to achieve this goal, denying Palestinians their most basic human rights including their right to self-determination.

The best-known feature of the occupation is the over 700-kilometer-long wall built by Israel in the occupied territories. Constructed on the pretext of enhancing security, the wall is a tool of intimidation, separation and annexation. In Gaza, nearly two million Palestinians are living under a blockade and prevented from leaving.

The day-to-day reality for people in the Occupied Palestinian Territories includes restrictions on movement, arbitrary arrest and detention, confiscation and destruction of property, segregation of transport, denial of basic services and resources and disproportionate military response to even the mildest forms of protest and resistance.

Palestinian citizens of Israel have also suffered a severe erosion of their civil rights. In late July, the Israeli Knesset, or parliament, approved the Jewish nation-state Basic Law. This legislation removes the official language status of Arabic, legalizes housing discrimination based on ethnic, religious, or national background and denies Palestinians the right to self-determination.

Workers in Israel are struggling in an economy shaped by reforms that led to the privatization of the public sector and the transfer of state assets to a few wealthy families. The social and economic system that has developed over the last two decades is fueling enormous income inequality. Israel has a high rate of inequality according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). More than a million workers live below the poverty line. Young workers, migrants and Arab workers are particularly vulnerable to the weakened social safety net and inadequate recognition of labour rights that coincided with these reforms.

Workers in the occupied territories are extremely vulnerable under these conditions. They share the same experiences of precarity felt by workers around the world, but the occupation makes their work experience doubly precarious. Many are forced to work in the illegal settlements or in Israel, where protection of rights is limited.

A permit is required to work outside the boundaries of the occupation. Revocation of this permit is used to threaten workers who resist in the workplace, but also in their communities where a tremendous amount of violence and intimidation takes place. Women are particularly at risk of harassment and exploitation.

The situation in Israel-Palestine is best summed up in the words of Fayrouz Sharqawi, coordinator of the Grassroots Jerusalem Community Mobilization. She told us that “the struggle of the Palestinian people is not a historical event, it is happening now, please do your best to help people understand its reality.”

Our delegation is committed to sharing our experiences with CUPE members across the country and will work to increase our understanding of, engagement with, and support of the Palestinian people.

Respectfully submitted:

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