



## Canada-Colombia Frontlines Delegation 2022 Joint Statement

In July 2022, Canadian labour leaders went to Colombia to stand in solidarity with Colombian labour and human rights defenders. Leaders from the Canadian Labour Congress, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, the National Union of Public and General Employees, and the Public Service Alliance of Canada joined the Canada-Colombia Frontlines Delegation, a multi-union initiative created to provide urgent protection and solidarity to labour and social movements in Colombia.

Due to years of relentless attacks on trade unionists and human rights and land defenders, it was a critical moment to be in Colombia to stand in solidarity with targeted leaders. On June 19, for the first time in its 214-year history, Colombians successfully elected a progressive government, led by President Gustavo Petro, and Vice-President Francia Marquez, the first Black woman to assume power. This pivotal moment offers a sense of hope and cautious optimism to counter decades of violence and impunity.

Since 2004, Canadian public sector unions have engaged in worker-to-worker solidarity exchanges with Colombian unions, social movements, and human rights defenders. This delegation met with trade union leaders and community leaders in Bogota, Cali, Buenaventura, Medellin, and Villagarzón. It was also a priority for the delegation to go to the rural coastal communities and the mountains where Colombia's Afro-Colombian and Indigenous communities are severely impacted by displacement and violence from transnational corporate and paramilitary activity. The delegation met with organizations and leaders from the 2021 National Strike that had ignited massive youth-led mobilizations that challenged regressive government policies and confronted the severe state violence that followed.

Calls for justice from families who lost loved ones to state violence continue to be a priority for many people. This is a devastating reminder of the enormous task ahead for the new government. According to the [International Trade Union Confederation \(ITUC\)](#), Colombia has repeatedly been among the top 10 most dangerous countries in the world in which to be a trade union leader. And we know these conditions will not change overnight or simply by electing new leadership in government.

This delegation shares the hope of many that the new government can now begin to repair the damage caused by severe right-wing policies of the past.

In its early stages, the government has already expressed commitments to important policies and initiatives, including

- universal free public education and child care,
- job creation,
- public pensions,
- environmental and water protection,
- agricultural reforms and food sovereignty.

Delegation members and their unions support the labour reform program developed by the trade union movement in Colombia, entitled “Cambio por la Vida” / “Change for Life,” which includes proposals for

- decent work,
- labour equity,
- improved working conditions,
- compliance with international labour standards, including freedom of association and collective bargaining.

This is an important moment for Colombians, and the international community, including the Government of Canada, must do all in its power to contribute to progressive reforms and ongoing peace negotiations. Canada’s trade unions will continue to stand in solidarity with workers, human rights and land defenders, and social movement leaders in their pursuit for peace and justice.

### **List of Delegates**

Canadian Labour Congress (CLC)  
Siobhán Vipond, Executive Vice-President

Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW)  
Nancy Beauchamp, former National Director Metro Montreal  
Amanda Cowie, Regional Grievance Officer

Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE)  
Aubrey Gonsalves, Diversity Vice-President, Black and Racialized Workers

National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE)  
Jason MacLean, Secretary-Treasurer  
Trevor King, NAPE Secretary-Treasurer

Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC)  
Craig Reynolds, Ontario Regional Executive Vice-President