Civil society urges new EU representative for foreign affairs to show leadership in the defence of human rights in Latin America

- Persecution of human rights defenders in Latin America reminds pervasive while Europe invests in the region
- EU development aid to Latin America decreased from 16% to 13% in the last period
- Concerns about the new role of the European private sector as an agent for development in Latin America

Brussels, 1 November. European civil society networks APRODEV, CIDSE, CIFCA, GRUPO SUR and OIDHACO have sent a letter congratulating Federica Mogherini on her recent appointment as EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and highlighting the importance of the EU taking a leadership role in the defence of human rights in its relations with Latin America during her mandate.

Taking into account the impact of relations between the European Union and Latin America, one of the concerns expressed in the letter to High Representative Mogherini, is related to the reduction of development aid to Latin America, which for the period 2014-2020 has seen a decrease from 16% to 13% in comparison with the 2007-2013 period. The civil society organisations are also concerned about “the increasingly prominent role of the European private sector in development cooperation policy with Latin America”.

The EU is the second-largest trading partner with Latin America. From 2001 to 2011, exports of raw materials from Latin America and the Caribbean increased from 44% to 52%, and these are expected to increase even further following the signing in December 2012 of the Association Agreement between the EU and Central America and the Free Trade Agreement between the EU and Peru and Colombia, and recently, with Ecuador. Indeed, the letter to the High Representative for Foreign Affairs highlights the danger that these agreements “condemn Latin America to become a major exporter of raw materials and receiver of manufactured products from Europe”.

In addition, the civil society organisations have pointed out how in recent years there has been a sharp increase in Latin America of persecution, sanction, stigmatisation and criminalisation of social protest activities and the legitimate claims of those who promote and defend human rights, and have specified that “these violations of human rights take place in the context of large-scale European economic investment projects”. They stress as imperative that “the EU Directives relating to the responsibility of European companies in their overseas investments are fulfilled”.

Finally, the recommendations from the letter’s signatories include calls for the European Union to ensure that its political dialogue and development cooperation policy between the EU and Latin America take into account the current high poverty and inequality rates in the region and are applied from a human rights perspective, “putting the interests of the people above commercial interests”.