

PROGRESSIVE DEVELOPMENT FOR DEMOCRACY, EQUALITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

Olof Palme International Center's strategy for international development work 2020-2025

Preamble	3
Our understanding of today's challenges.....	4
Our understanding of progressive development.....	5
Our political priorities.....	7
Countering the threats to democracy and human rights.....	7
Advancing equality and worker's rights – building new alliances and pushing progressive politics	8
Sustainability through a just transition – countering climate change	8
Promoting peace and dialogue – mitigating armed conflict and social tensions	9
Opposing the backlash – increasing gender equality	10
Our methods	11

PREAMBLE

Today we are faced with several global challenges that will define our future. Climate change is demanding immediate collective action, rapidly growing inequalities and destructive conflicts tear societies apart, and democracy is under attack in a way not seen in decades. Never has the need for global solutions based on international collaboration and solidarity been greater. Instead populism, nationalism, sectarianism and racism flourishes.

A global movement for progressive development that advances democracy, equality and sustainability is necessary to achieve the aims of the labour movement of freedom, social justice, peace, workers' and human rights. A global movement that is not uniform or singular, but rather a multitude of voices raised for a common cause globally *and* locally.

The Olof Palme International Center see the positive effects of this movement in the work of the rural and political activists in the Philippines hardest hit by the increasingly fierce monsoon seasons, in the calls for genuine and meaningful participation by democracy activists in Palestine, and it is reflected in the global trade union movement's call for a Just transition. Our main task as the Swedish labour movement's international solidarity organisation is to work with our sister organisations around the world to be part of this global movement for progressive development.

This ambition stands in sharp contrast to the predominating *neo-liberal perspective* that puts unregulated free markets and economic growth above every other societal dimension. The *social liberal view* that have few aspirations beyond rule of law, institution building, human rights and formal democracy. Or, the widely held *developmental narrative* of change and progress in relation to Agenda 2030 as something apolitical and technical. Instead, we work on the premise that to fulfil the 17 goals of Agenda 2030 there is an immediate need for sustained collective organising, political actions and democratic representation that can advance progressive reforms, change societies and inevitably challenge existing power structures of social, economic, and political systems.

The strategy is the outcome of a collective process that has involved our organisation, representatives from our member and partner organisations as well as Swedish and international experts. It is based on an analysis of what makes progressive development possible in today's increasingly globalised and polarised world. It clarifies our added value, what we want to achieve, where we work, why it is relevant for us to work there, what issues and partners we prioritise, and how we aim to succeed. It will be used when developing operational plans, programmes and projects, as a basis for assessing initiatives, partnerships and proposals for cooperation, and it offers the framework for expanding as an organisation.

The Olof Palme International Center has a unique role in the Swedish development context as the international solidarity organisation of the Swedish labour movement. Based on this mandate we will work with the international labour movement to achieve progressive development for democracy, equality and sustainability.

OUR UNDERSTANDING OF TODAY'S CHALLENGES

Globalisation is two-faced. It has led to poverty reduction as well as improved access to rights, health, education, and security. We find the potential for organising and mobilising progressive forces in our new society, increasingly interconnected and intertwined through the growing mobility of people, rapid technological advances, international cooperation, relations, and networks, and globally shared value systems and norms.

The mechanisms and structures that divides, dominates and governs are also shared around the world, even if they come in different shapes and forms. And, the crucial need for cross-sectoral, cross-community, cross-border alliances, social dialogue, and mobilisation for progressive change stem from this other, very negative aspect of our global society. This is characterised by the fusion of:

1. Today's capitalist system including the dominance of the financial sector and multinational and transnational corporations paired with the globalisation of production and consumption, rising inequality and extreme concentration of wealth;
2. A development growth model that leads to rapid climate change and failing ecosystems, constituting an immediate threat to our very existence;
3. The increased production, scope and use of advanced military, security and police powers and technologies as means of domination and resolution of social and political conflicts;
4. The shrinking space for trade unions, civil society and oppositional forces that limits and circumscribes their influence.

Separatist or nationalist organising and discourse will not be enough in the face of these challenges. It will fall short of providing the platforms needed for organising, mobilising, and alliance building for a progressive development that are able to channel the growing engagement, anger, resentment and fear in a constructive way.

The vision required is global. However, the effects of the system are primarily felt locally and unequally and mobilising, organising and alliances for comprehensive reforms must therefore be sought and supported at several levels. At the same time, they need to be based on a shared sense of purpose and mutual understanding. The growing international consensus that advocates for common solutions, increased equality, decent work and sustainable development, represented primarily by Agenda 2030 and the Paris Agreement, offers such a purpose to rally around.

As the international labour movement, we find ourselves on the defensive in a lot of ways. In the middle of a crisis of both identity, organising principles and political vision, a new theory for progressive development is needed in the North and South alike. We should therefore relate to, engage with, and mobilise for these global processes at all possible and relevant levels as part of our renewal and revitalisation.

OUR UNDERSTANDING OF PROGRESSIVE DEVELOPMENT

What is then the basis for progressive development and how do we achieve it? Answering this question sustains our *theory of change* and makes us better equipped to support, contribute to and engage with progressive movements and processes. We define progressive development, in line with Social Democratic theory and our experience as a movement, as sustainable development (socially, economically and environmentally) based on social justice, and the liberal democratic politics required to get there.

A crucial factor for progressive development is when alliances of citizens are created among a broad range of political collectives such as trade unions, civil society organisations, social movements, protest movements, community-based organisations, interest organisations, religious congregations and/or political parties. The uneven development generated today is creating divisive interests that makes it difficult, if not impossible, to rely solely on our own movement. Sustained, and potentially long-lasting change happens instead when broad alliances gather behind political agendas for reform and proposals towards sustainable development, equality, freedom, social justice, democracy, peace, or human rights. Hence, progressive development is possible when these alliances are sustained for a common cause and translate their strength into political power and representation in economic and political spheres.

Our mission statement follows from this view of how change is achieved and is firmly rooted in the history and current experiences of our movement.

The Olof Palme International Center supports **democratic organisations** that come together in **broad, strategic alliances** in pursuit of **progressive development**.

1. *Democracy is the founding principle* of the international labour movement, and collective organising constitutes the basic means to achieve change, since without collective and democratic organising there are little prospects for broad and lasting progress. In our developmental work the word democratic refers to three main aspects (in order of priority):
 - i. a shared vision of the need for increased democracy and active participation,
 - ii. a shared understanding of the working methods used, i.e. inclusive, participatory, peaceful, non-violent, and non-discriminatory, and
 - iii. a shared ambition of how we are organised, i.e. the existence and practice of democratic values, structures and procedures.
2. *Broad, strategic alliances are essential* to achieve sustainable change based on the realisation that no organisation or movement, no matter how strong, can achieve inclusive and lasting progressive development alone. Change demands synergies and cooperation within and across societies. This refers specifically to collective actions that are centred around a goal, interest or purpose, and that gathers a variety of organisations from different sectors in society.
3. *Progressive development provides purpose and meaning*, to mobilise, organise and rally behind shared goals.

These three pillars amount to *social democratic politics* that strive to realise democracy and human rights, economic equality, peace and gender equality by democratic means, in such a transformative way that the realisation of these aims reinforce each other.

Furthermore, it has a direct bearing on how the international labour movement needs to develop, both in terms of strategies for organising, decision-making procedures, involvement of members, inclusion of and collaboration with other parts of society, as well as the development and application of progressive policy and reforms.

OUR POLITICAL PRIORITIES

Our five political priorities give further content to our theory of change and how we view and define progressive development. These priorities shall be used as a starting point for developing our operations, when defining purpose and aim of cooperations, alliance building and partnerships, when we develop common action plans, or as a point of departure for organisational and strategic development. Not all priorities are expected to be relevant for everything we do, but everything we do need to relate to one or more of them explicitly.

Countering the threats to democracy and human rights

The Olof Palme International Center will support democratic development and increased respect for human rights through;

- the spread of popular education and a democratic culture,
- the strengthening and organisational development of democratic civil society organisations, trade unions and political parties, and
- the development of strategies for broad alliances in their local contexts.

The space for civil society is shrinking and democratic culture, values and the democratic system as such is being threatened. The reasons are found in rising economic, political and social inequality, authoritarian regimes' oppression of personal and political freedoms, increased militarisation, and in the actions of dominating and powerful corporations. There are more formal democracies in the world than ever before but according to democracy indexes the state of democracy weakened in more than 70 countries in 2018. This inconsistency sheds light on the fact that genuine democracy, characterised by respect for human rights and social justice, that makes room for active political participation and representation, adds up to something more than mere electoral procedures.

Authoritarianism paired with populism has adapted to the universal acceptance of liberal democracy by using their electoral wins, however they are won, to push back personal and democratic rights and freedoms, to attack human rights and democratic institutions, and to pursue absolute control of the State. Democracy is undermined from within by a combination of deception, domination and dismantling. The efforts to protect and develop democratic values and institutions, to support a politically aware and conscious citizenry will be a key priority during this strategic period.

Democracy is the only system that one needs to learn. It differs from any other system in that it depends on citizens that have been educated not just in the functioning of the governing system but also of its values and *how* to act as a citizen. Citizens in a democracy therefore need to be encouraged to think critically, act independently and organise collectively. To this end we regard popular education not merely as means to an end but an end itself. It supports and fosters democratic culture and values. It creates aware and active citizens.

Our work to support a democratic and vibrant civil society and active citizens continues to be vital for protecting democracy, supporting the rule of law, and to achieve meaningful democratic participation.

Advancing equality and worker's rights – building new alliances and pushing progressive politics

The Olof Palme International Center will strengthen the work with the trade union movement by;

- promotion and support for innovative ways of mobilising informal and precarious workers,
- fostering of alliance building between the trade union movement, political parties and civil society organisations, as well as
- supporting the trade union movement to develop policy and reform proposals for progressive and sustainable economic development

Today's globalised economy is characterised by an increasing informalisation of the labour market due to corporate politics of out-sourcing production, application of new technologies and growing mobility of capital and people. These trends all pose challenges for the international trade union movement's organising principles and identity. The difficulties we face to defend basic rights amid growing inequality lead to a weakening in the trade union density and limits the effects of collective bargaining and existing platforms for social dialogue. At the same time, we are struggling to find new ways of organising our work in a growing informal sector, a widespread precariat, as well as in relation to emerging social and political struggles advanced by other parts of civil society. Trade unions across the globe are on the defensive trying to protect social gains and existing legislation and institutions, including ILO core conventions.

The tendencies dominating today's capitalist economy must thus be met with new strategies, partnerships and based on a new analysis. The aim is not only to defend and advance conquered rights in the developed world, but to promote the socio-economic principles of the welfare state as the norm in developing countries as well as social dialogue as the main mechanism to get there. The economic system creates divisive interests that challenges unity and alliances. The development and implementation of transformative reforms is crucial to overcome these divisions. These reforms should include areas such as sustainable growth, gender equality, decent work and decent life through universal social protection systems and the redistribution of wealth through progressive tax systems. Processes of social dialogue based on relevant ILO instruments and platforms are ways to move this forward and we will support the Global Deal as an important tool. It is therefore central to advance the unique role and voice of trade unions as the most representative of worker's rights, the legitimate partner in social dialogue and develop their role in developing and advancing progressive reforms. When trade unions and progressive political parties together with other civil society organisations construct broad alliances as a political force for organising and mobilisation to this end it has proven very effective.

Sustainability through a just transition – countering climate change

The Olof Palme International Center will increase our engagement to counter climate change in line with and beyond the Paris Agreement by;

- engaging the international labour movement broadly in the work for a Just transition,
- supporting partner organisations to develop local and regional reform proposals for a Just transition
- contributing to alliance building at all levels that pushes for these reforms

Climate change is an immediate threat to our very existence. If we don't find a way to counter it in the coming decade all other reforms and progressive developments will be for nothing. Already today the effects are visible with dire consequences for millions of people across the

globe losing their homes in fires, floods and droughts in a vicious spiral that reinforces inequality and deepens poverty and injustice. Workers, farmers and poor are the worst affected by climate change today and has very limited options to deal with the effects. Further, countries in the developed world such as Sweden, are not just the main cause to the current situation, we owe much of our ongoing and excessive contribution to climate change to imports from countries where people and popular organisations are weak and poorly organised and environmental legislation is limited or non-existent. The international labour movement needs to increase its engagement drastically in the coming transition. Our way to do this is to develop responses that address inequality at the same time as climate change. If we are unable to do this, transforming our societies in the necessary way will prove impossible.

We are part of the international trade union movement's call for a *Just transition* towards a fossil free, socially, economically, and environmentally sustainable world. The agenda encompasses a range of social interventions needed to secure workers' jobs and livelihoods when economies are shifting to sustainable production, it emphasises the centrality of ILO core conventions and the importance of social dialogue to get there. We align with and support the campaign for a Just transition that places increased equality at the centre of the necessary reform projects. Equality ensures sustainable change and more equal societies are better equipped to tackle the radical shift and structural changes needed of our societies, economies and production to address the climate threat.

Promoting peace and dialogue – mitigating armed conflict and social tensions

The Olof Palme International Center will increase our efforts to promote peace and dialogue by;

- contributing to the international labour movement's engagement for peace and the reduction of destructive conflicts,
- supporting local, national, regional and international peace efforts and movements, and
- promoting a peace, anti-war and anti-violence agenda for a demilitarised world free from the nuclear threat

In many of the countries and regions where we are working, a situation of armed, destructive conflicts and social tensions define the lives of people. This situation leads to massive loss of lives, forced migration, obliterated basic infrastructures, and damaged social fabrics. All this makes progressive development a distant dream. This is evident in relation to contexts of violent armed conflicts, but also in countries in relative peace and calm where social and political tensions repetitively sparks waves of violence and fear. From a long historical perspective research show that we live in more peaceful times, with fewer conflicts in the world and a lower probability to fall victim in an armed conflict. However, for many of our partners and their communities, this knowledge offers little comfort. For them, everyday life is plagued by state violence, persecution, deportations, and religious extremism. They are caught in fabricated group identity tensions fuelled and exploited by actors to advance tribal, sectarian, nationalistic, racist and discriminatory agendas and policies.

The labour movement's approach, today and historically, to manage and prevent harmful conflicts is humanistic and progressive. It seeks to prevent and eliminate armed or destructive conflicts through dialogue, mediation, conflict prevention and peacebuilding in inclusive, cooperative ways. It strives, furthermore, to achieve progressive development by using only nonviolent methods and engaging in open democratic organisations and

movements. It promotes joint problem solving and integrative conflict resolution. We understand that challenging existing power structures will create conflicts of various kind, but this approach always seeks to avoid violent social tensions that could be originate from the dynamics of development. It strives to achieve mutual understanding. This realisation of interdependence was at the heart of the term *common security*, coined by Olof Palme in his international work for nuclear disarmament, and is still relevant today as this work continues.

Opposing the backlash – increasing gender equality

The Olof Palme International Center will work for increased gender equality and advancement of women's rights by;

- emphasising it as a core component in organisational development in civil society organisations, trade unions and political parties, and
- increasing the capacity to articulate policy proposals within the same target group, with the aim to strengthen women's rights and the implementation of the same

As a feminist organisation the Olof Palme International Center engages in the universal struggle for equal rights for all, against discrimination, gendered power structures and prevailing norms curtailing every individual's opportunity and freedom. We therefore support initiatives that stand up against the current backlash against women rights and the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/-sexual and intersexed (LGBTI) persons as autocratic, conservative and racist right-wing movements gain strength and power across the world. The gains made for gender equality is among the first casualties whenever these reactionary forces come to power. It rolls back achievements and makes continued advancement more distant. The hatred, discrimination and prejudices towards women, LBGTI, ethnic and religious minorities are used as a call to arms when these forces are trying to get to power and in cynic processes for political gains. Violence, threats and conflicts is the result, limiting freedom, curtailing democracy and denying equal rights.

Working for gender equality is about achieving real democracy by challenging the prevailing norms of masculinity and femininity, by guaranteeing equal opportunities and meaningful representation. It is a decisive factor for true political participation, as well as for freedom of association and assembly.

Gender equality should be handled as a fundamental issue of freedom, justice and rights to the labour movement. We identify the labour market and the workplace as two of the most central arenas to effectively counter gender inequalities. Advancing the agenda of equal rights for all can only be done in a legitimate way if we ourselves are consistent with these principles. We need to analyse and question our internal structures, organisational culture and our methods of work to become more inclusive and open. This is true for the Olof Palme International Center as an organisation, in our operations and for the international labour movement. Alliances should be forged with women's organisations and social movements to develop as organisations and to increase our ambitions for more gender equal work places, labour markets and societies.

OUR METHODS

The Olof Palme International Center will increase our collaborations, align our programmes and deepen our relationships with the international labour movement during this strategy period. We will do this in Sweden, with our European sister organisations and foundations and internationally in relation to existing networks and political alliances.

We define the international labour movement as a broad gathering of civil society organisations comprising political parties, trade unions and popular movements working for progressive development. In a more formal sense it is defined by the various international organisations and platforms that our member organisations are part of and actively engaged in and their various regional and national structures and affiliates. In different countries and contexts this also involves close allies, civil society organisations and community-based organisations with a shared vision and understanding of progressive development.

We will increase our efforts to organise our development work in a way that strengthens and reinforces relationships of solidarity and partnership within the labour movement and strengthens alliance building more broadly. In a way, this means going back to the historic roots of our international movement focusing our attention more fully on the *relationship* with our sister organisations and the goals of our mutual efforts.

The Olof Palme International Center shall engage in a committed and true partnership with the international labour movement through financial and organisational support by;

- using methods to increase organisational development and organising skills,
- exploring creative strategies and forms of mobilisation and alliance building
- encouraging and supporting the empowerment and inclusion of marginalised and disadvantaged groups,
- contributing to policy development and reform agendas,
- facilitating exchanges of experiences and strategies as well as partnerships between existing and new partner organisations that bridge gaps between different sectors.

This implies that we shall part from an analysis of the needs, capacities and priorities of our member organisations, their sister organisations and the networks and alliances they are engaged in when choosing partners and planning programmes. Together with our member organisations we need to assess if our sister organisations in the labour movement in a specific context are dynamic, relevant and interested in advancing progressive development:

1. If they are – we work with them.
2. If they face challenges but are willing to develop – we support them.
3. If they are not, or there is no labour movement – we work with other, likeminded organisations and movements.

When developing the administrative systems and the planning, monitoring and evaluation tools for our development work we shall further strive to place the *organisations* at the centre and create systems that facilitates and supports mutual and equal partnerships guided by the principles of development effectiveness. Given the development challenges described above this also means that we need to find ways of organising our support that are more *flexible and adaptive*, ready to respond to unpredicted events, rapidly changing contexts, and unexpected effects of our interventions. To both threats and possibilities.

The strategy will be evaluated through a mid-term review in the beginning of 2023. The evaluation will be organised through structured, collective dialogue and reflection meetings with staff, member organisations, partner organisations and experts.

During the period, we shall initiate a process to partly *decentralise* as an organisation to increase our local presence in relevant networks and to be able to provide the necessary support to both our international partners in the labour movement as well as to our Swedish member organisations. This is also crucial to improve the work environment and security of our local colleagues and it is necessary for us to be able to sustain support to both big and small organisations, to possible loosely held networks and to increase our adaptability and organisational focus.

We shall broaden our funding and expand our operations to be able to better achieve the development aims and priorities of this strategy as well as to increase our sustainability and strength.

OUR INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENT

The Olof Palme International Center and the Swedish labour movement work with the international labour movement in various parts and regions of the world. In most of these regions we have a long commitment to progressive development, dating back to times of colonialism and fights for independence. This long trajectory of solidarity with workers, marginalised and poor communities offers us legitimacy and credibility in our continued work for change. This in a context defined by globalisation and the immediate threats to democracy, our climate and the gains already made in relation to human, social, economic rights and access to security, health and education.

There are many examples of successful alliance building in our shared history of solidarity. In South Africa when democracy and freedom won over apartheid. In the Philippines with the creation of a united and consolidated labour movement. When the new and progressive constitution was developed in Zimbabwe. With the adoption of ILO Convention 189 in country after country around the world safeguarding domestic workers rights. Or most recently, in Macedonia with the successful support to mass protests and civic alliances that got rid of authoritarian rule. It is with these and many similar experiences in mind that we direct our efforts the coming years.

The Swedish labour movements three legs; a social democratic party, a blue-collar trade union federation and popular civil society movements create opportunities for relationship building in key areas of society and for progressive development. We shall further explore the possibility of fostering dialogue amongst these organisations and beyond, advancing the ability of the labour movement to both exercise and hold power accountable in Sweden and internationally.

The existing relationships and networks of the international labour movement offers a constructive platform to engage in the many times sensitive issues of organisational renewal and policy development needed to meet these global challenges and join a global movement for progressive development. The international network of sister organisations within the international labour movement will be built on to facilitate exchanges of experiences, enable international advocacy as well as contribute to organisational development.

In the coming period we are focusing on the following regions: Middle East and North Africa, the Western Balkans, Southern Africa, Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America.