

1970-2020 : 50 years of solidarity with social movements!

There is not one developed world and one underdeveloped world just one maldeveloped world



50 years of history

THE ORIGINS OF CETIM

CETIM, a research and publishing center, was founded in 1970 out of a desire to act to create a fairer world. In time it began working in the United Nations to promote more egalitarian and democratic international relations, but also for the defense and promotion of human rights, particularly economic, social and cultural rights.

Fifty years ago, in a world full of hope and the promise of change, and inspired by the wave of affirmation from the newly independent countries and by the mobilization of Western youth, a group of anti-imperialist activists created CETIM in Geneva.

Five years later, in 1975, the centre for studies and research was formally constituted as an association. Its motto “There is not one developed world and one underdeveloped world, just one maldeveloped world” still encapsulates the focus of its struggle for a just world.

Since its foundation, CETIM’s research has tried to answer the questions raised by “development”. To that end, it relies on activities and instruments of various kinds: publications, support actions and training programs, awareness and mobilization campaigns, and work within UN institutions; it has also set up a documentation center.

CETIM’s main work is analysis and study, with the aim of raising awareness and encouraging civil society to

adopt a critical position on the current models of development. In CETIM’s view, this analysis must be a collective, bottom-up undertaking.

In one of its first campaigns, it denounced the involvement of Swiss banks in the financing of the apartheid regime in South Africa, and later launched itself into the battle against illegitimate debt and structural adjustment programs.



In the same spirit, it was one of the first associations to condemn neoliberal policies and their impact on society, a subject that is now more important than ever.

The term “maldevelopment” is a neologism coined as a challenge to the positive assumptions associated with Western development in the “development”/“underdevelopment” dichotomy. The scope of the concept is geographical, social and ecological and the perspective is global, referring to the North as well as the South.

As long ago as 1990, CETIM was discussing the limits of the capitalist system and the problems it posed:

“Never have we produced so much and never have we produced it so fast. Science and technology have progressed more in the last fifty years than in all the previous centuries. And yet never before have the problems of chronic poverty affected so many people throughout the world. Ecological disasters are multiplying and scientists are increasingly warning that today’s civilization poses a threat to the very survival of humanity and the planet.”



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A BRIDGE BETWEEN SOUTH AND NORTH

When CETIM was founded, the expression “Third World” was widely used. It applied to the so-called “underdeveloped” countries, which were a battlefield where, at the height of the Cold War, the powerful sought to expand their sphere of influence. As for the term “Europe”, at that time it meant capitalist Western Europe as opposed to “socialist” Eastern Europe. However, it was not long before, given the inescapable involvement of the United States in most situations, CETIM’s work grew to cover North-South relations and then globalization in general, as that process spread.

At the beginning of the 1980s, CETIM turned to the United Nations to boost the impact of its work. It obtained consultative status first with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and later with the Economic and Social Council of the United

Nations (ECOSOC). Gradually, CETIM became actively involved in the work of the Commission on Human Rights, the predecessor of the current Human Rights Council, becoming one of the spokespersons for peoples fighting for their rights in the UN.

Though an ardent defender of all human rights and aware that no one right is more important than any other, CETIM nevertheless focused on the right of peoples to self-determination, and then, starting in the 1990s, on economic, social and cultural rights and the right to development, rights that are still neglected today.

Over time, CETIM has also specialized in the defense of the rights of peasants and in the analysis of the problems posed by multinational corporations, two topics that have grown in importance over the years.

CETIM AT THE UN: REPRESENTING AND DEFENDING SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

For CETIM it is a strategic choice to work within the UN. The goal is to advocate in favor of human rights, in particular economic, social and cultural rights, and to bring the struggles of peoples and social movements on the ground into the international spotlight.

Despite the UN’s limitations, CETIM believes it is still a space where peoples and social movements must make their voices heard, a space that they have to make their own.



It is also a relevant and effective forum for the development of standards and policies on the major issues that concern humanity and for providing support to struggles on the ground. CETIM’s location gives it a place in the

discussed, and thanks to its consultative status with that body, CETIM is able to guide social movements through the maze of UN mechanisms in support of their struggles. Our association is not the only one with

front ranks to advance its endeavors. After all, Geneva hosts the headquarters of the UN Human Rights Council, where human rights issues are

consultative status, but our work is by its very nature unique. In effect, based on the fact that the dominant system is at the root of the problems linked to maldevelopment, CETIM argues for structural changes to the prevailing economic, social and political system as a *sine qua non* for the defense and overall promotion of human rights and the establishment of a model of development that is respectful and sustainable.

In fact, CETIM’s work is a direct attack on the causes of human rights violations, which are to be found in a system that places the profit of a small minority above the public interest and the rights of peoples.

CETIM’S WORK AT THE UN

In order to carry out its work at the UN, CETIM exploits all the possibilities for action offered by the institution.

Development of new standards

First and foremost among the lines of action open to CETIM at the UN is the development of new standards that reflect changes in society and fill the gaps in international human rights law.

As an organization with consultative status at the UN, and in consultation with its partners, CETIM has initiated a number of negotiating processes aimed at developing new legal standards. Within such a framework, it is actually possible to put forward specific proposals on the content of future international laws, and to engage in advocacy work with the delegations of selected States to obtain their support for the needs and demands arising on the ground.

In the same vein, since the 1990s, CETIM has condemned, at the UN, the stranglehold of TNCs on the economy and their hold on governments. It was committed to the adoption of binding norms to regulate the activities of TNCs. But to begin with it was very isolated. Fortunately, the situation changed and CETIM, joined by a cohort of organizations, was able to step up its activity through the new UN Intergovernmental Working Group in charge of elaborating a binding treaty on transnational corporations.

In that framework, and alongside the Global Campaign to Dismantle the Power of Transnational Corporations and End Impunity (which brings together more than 200 organizations around the world), CETIM emphasizes the power that these entities exert over the public authorities and the need to act if it is to be possible to control and sanction their activities when they commit human rights violations.

Complaints

Another possibility open to CETIM is to make complaints alleging rights violations to the UN human rights protection mechanisms.

Over the years, CETIM has built up a worldwide network of peasant organizations, unions, NGOs, research centers, and indigenous peoples’ and women’s organizations.

CETIM’s goal is to help its partners in the field to report violations of which they are victims or direct witnesses to these international bodies. The final decisions in such complaints can be used as legal or political instruments that organizations and movements can leverage in their daily struggles and in pursuing their claims at the local or national level.



Peasants’ rights

Since the mid-1990s, CETIM has worked in collaboration with La Via Campesina (LVC), both through its publications and its interventions within the UN, to draw attention to the situation of small family farmers, who are crushed by the monopoly of agribusiness on the food chain.

Following LVC’s decision, in the 2000s, to refer the matter to the UN with a view to developing standards on the rights of peasants, CETIM accompanied it throughout the process, making available its long UN experience and its NGO status.

Patient advocacy work with experts and States as well as with other NGOs and UN officials was necessary to put this issue on the agenda of the institution. CETIM made a great effort to ensure that peasant and other rural organizations (herders, fisherfolk, agricultural workers, indigenous peoples) were heard and that the UN text reflected their needs and demands.

Finally, after 17 years of struggle, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants was ratified by the UN General Assembly in New York in 2018. It is a victory for CETIM and its partners, as well as for all peasants around the world.

Investigating the crime of a transnational corporation

In 2015, CETIM was approached by a trade union in the Colombian agro-food sector. Thirteen years earlier, a trade unionist had been murdered, and while the perpetrator had been convicted, the Colombian State had never investigated the people behind the crime.

After CETIM lodged a complaint, in coordination with its Colombian partner organizations, the case became the subject of proceedings in the UN Human Rights Committee, the body responsible for monitoring the implementation of civil and political rights.

Finally, in May 2020, the Committee reached a decision: Colombia was found guilty of having failed in its duty of investigation. It is therefore required to reopen the case in order to investigate the instigators of the crime. Since, under Colombian law, the State is obliged to apply the decisions of this UN body, it must take action. This is a victory for CETIM and all human rights movements, as the case has set an international precedent.



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A PUBLISHING HOUSE LIKE NO OTHER

Initially a study and research center, CETIM soon moved to adopt a tool that would allow it to disseminate its analyses and studies more widely, namely publishing. It brought out a series of books on subjects often neglected by the media and major commercial publishing houses.

To start with, in the early 1970s, CETIM published its own research, in the PubliCetim series. Later it took on authors and groups with similar concerns to its own. The publishing arm of the association aims to give readers a means of understanding the way the world is developing. Aware of the unequal balance of power between the various social actors, both internationally and nationally, CETIM seeks, through its publications, to shed serious and original light on many crucial subjects, such as the causes of conflicts that are a threat to peace, maldevelopment and the quest for alternatives likely to ensure egalitarian and sustainable development.

Other topics addressed in CETIM's books are agriculture and food sovereignty, international law, North/South relations, peoples' emancipation struggles and their history, migration issues, the environment, social transformation, transnational corporations, alterglobalism, democracy and human rights.

Though intended primarily for the general public, CETIM's publications also target a more militant readership engaged in various movements and campaigns. In 2013, in order to reach a younger audience, CETIM launched its collection "Pensées d'hier pour demain" (Thoughts

from the past to help think the future). These are short collections of the key writings of anti-colonial political leaders who were at the heart of peoples' struggles for emancipation in the past and whose thinking and work are still of the utmost relevance today. CETIM hopes that this collection will enable the youth of the countries concerned, including European youth with foreign roots, to



The collection "Pensées d'hier pour demain"

reappropriate a history that is often denied or erased by official historiography, and thereby gain a better understanding of today's world and learn to deconstruct the simplistic narratives of many hate-based groups. Already published are the writings of Thomas Sankara, Kwame Nkrumah and Frantz Fanon, for example, and the latest to appear are those of Sheikh Anta Diop and the late Samir Amin, who was a close friend of CETIM.

CETIM also issues occasional papers, sometimes published jointly with partner organizations.

CETIM's books are sold in bookshops, but can mainly be obtained through the civil society network, at conferences and events in which the CETIM team and its members regularly take part.

In addition, in 2005, CETIM launched a series of publications on human rights as a contribution to information and training for all those who fight for the respect and implementation of these rights, and in particular as a means of strengthening the capacities of social organizations and movements in the South. These publications focus mainly on economic, social and cultural rights, the rights of peasants, and transnational corporations (TNCs). All are available in three languages (French, English and Spanish) and freely accessible on the website of our association.



The human rights publications series



Selection of works published by CETIM from 1978 to 2020

To act for a fairer society, to ensure respect for human rights and to support CETIM's work join us!

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