

OCTOBER 22nd, 2018

BUENOS AIRES DECLARATION: RECYCLERS UNITED IN RESISTANCE!

Recyclers, cartoneros, waste pickers, carreros, biffins, récupérateurs, catadores and canners, we have gathered together in Buenos Aires for a global exchange between delegates from around the world. Our goal was to continue building our network and to strengthen our labor unions and associations. We have discussed, debated and agreed upon many issues that hinder our work; we have also outlined a collective strategy to increase our global strength, both to make our work known, as well as to continue fighting for our rights on all levels: we demand paid compensation for the service we all provide.

In recent years a seemingly boundless system of exclusion, destruction and rejection has advanced. Many of our countries are currently facing a neoliberal offensive that tramples both our freedoms and the rights we have fought so hard for, putting the environment at risk as well as our own lives. It's a trend rooted in disposable culture and the glorification of wealth.

In this context, during the exchange, we shared our experiences of life and resistance, with particular attention to one common, universal threat: the corporate takeover of waste management, and the increasing privatization of the sector. Producers and packaging manufacturers, which do not acknowledge our work and thus develop products that are hard to recover and recycle, promote laws that exclude us from value chains, and with full governmental support at all levels. These measures increase our exclusion, by dismissing our role in the various stages of waste management (**generation, collection, transportation, treatment, appraisal and -only then- final disposal**). This all results in the negation of our rights- diminishing and even removing those rights we fought so hard for, including access to recyclable materials, free movement within the city, free association, paid wages, and the right to grow socially, technically and economically as individuals and as a movement.

We have also verified the existence of perverse mechanisms like, for example, the closure of landfills without alternate solutions for our fellow workers who work and even live there; and state policies of all sorts that restrict our full development and, in some cases, prohibit and criminalize our work. These issues produce anxiety, voluntary and forced displacement, and increased poverty levels among those of us who, for hundreds of years, have fulfilled our economic needs through autonomous, legal and honest work. This we have done in the hopes of gaining access to opportunities and of developing our human dignity through self-invented labor that has provided our families with basic necessities like daily meals, shelter and work.

The overlap between corporations and governments within the system protects companies, increasing their gain while exacerbating inequality in our society. In this way, excluding and criminalizing our work increases environmental degradation and poverty in our society.

At the same time, and like we pointed out before, the State has stepped aside and no longer guarantees every citizen's rights. This endangers the few rights and victories we have obtained throughout the years, and endangers our leaders, leaving them with no protection when they are persecuted.

During the exchange we came to the following agreements:

- We do not accept landfill closures without real, true and consulted alternatives for our fellow recyclers who work and live there.

- The State must guarantee organizational support, regardless of whether we work in landfills or in the streets; also guaranteeing our right to protest.

- Full and integral participation of us, recyclers, in the waste management chain must be recognized, protected and promoted, in all stages of waste recovery, from collection, transportation, treatment, appraisal to final disposal; assuring safe and healthy working conditions.

- Recognition of our work must include, among other things, paid remuneration for our provision of public recycling services, as compensation for the multiple social, environmental and productive benefits that we provide.

- Paid remuneration must, at least, equal access to a minimum wage or its equivalent which, in our case, can be considered as compensation for all the environmental work that we conduct every day.

- Despite these benefits, we have been excluded and our rights as citizens and humans have been constantly denied. Because of this we demand we be granted access to health, education, food, shelter, social security and recreation. (Land, Shelter and Labor).

- We reject incineration because it both dangerously contaminates the air we all breathe and threatens our livelihoods. While our work reintroduces raw materials into the industry, incineration destroys them. In this sense, our work is environmentally, economically and socially sustainable and reflects international accords on environmental protection.

- We reject any Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) or Circular Economy initiatives that do not recognize or incorporate our work into the waste management chain. A proper policy on this subject must contribute economically and logistically to our work.

- In this sense, we ask that the system of production adapts its materials and designs in a manner that will facilitate recovery and recycling for us.

- We demand access to all information pertinent to our work and to be allowed prior consultation in any decision, measure, law or public policy related to our work. No one can recycle better than we do.

- We reject all forms of criminalization, discrimination and segregation of our work. The rights we have achieved, and the ones we have yet to win, will be for all our fellow workers.

Building upon these demands and our strategic goals as a union, we commit to continue strengthening our movement and organizing it to defend our work and achieve these objectives. We will analyze situations that endanger our rights, mobilize against them, and propose alternative strategies to achieve full rights to recyclable materials, representing the interests of all our fellow workers.

As popular economy workers we aim to jointly work with other sectors -including street vendors, trade fair workers, small rural producers, recovered factory workers, among others, with a commitment to share our experiences and provide support to all who need it against the detrimental actions of governments and corporations, promoting the creation of a strong and legitimate grassroots movements.

No worker without wage, no worker without rights.

