

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY REPORT 2016-2017



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INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

A YEAR IN REVIEW

CUPE international solidarity work in 2016-2017 has included worker-to-worker exchanges and solidarity with trade unions and social movements in Colombia, South Korea, Nicaragua, the Philippines, Guatemala and Honduras. Over the past year, we learned a great deal from our sisters and brothers in other countries, reaffirming our belief that our ability to defend public services and decent jobs in our communities depends on our ability to defend those same services and good jobs in countries around the world.

Privatization, contracting-out and contract flipping by multinational corporations, with headquarters in Canada, the US, Europe, China or elsewhere, are on the rise and negatively affecting workers all over the world. CUPE members across the country are increasingly affected by decisions made in these multinational corporate boardrooms.

Governments, including current federal and provincial governments in Canada, favour corporations who often receive multimillion-dollar contracts, funded in part by taxpayers. Austerity agendas and the international trade agreements imposed on us, falsely justify the need for the corporate sector to operate in the public sector for profit.

Workers' rights, wages and conditions are being reduced to the lowest common denominator and workers are uniting to fight back everywhere.

It is in this context that workers have chosen to build alliances with workers across borders. CUPE National created the Global Justice Fund because we understand our power to fight back is strengthened through the relationships we build with CUPE members and with workers in other workplaces struggling for common causes, including workers in other countries.



Mark H.



Charles Fleury.



CUPE NATIONAL GLOBAL JUSTICE FUND

WORKER-TO-WORKER SOLIDARITY IS A STRATEGY AND A SOLUTION.



If you follow the news and world events regularly you are no doubt feeling like the world is a dangerous place. News outlets are regularly reporting on the inflammatory racist rhetoric of US President Donald Trump. We hear about violent attacks on the Syrian people, or about the dangerous migratory journeys of workers from the Global South. The backdrop to this constant barrage of bleak news is the emergence of resistance movements. Whether it is the mass mobilization of workers in opposition to corruption in South Korea, or the mobilization of Americans declaring “No Muslim Ban,” resistance is growing.

We are living in a time of economic crisis. Oxfam reported in January 2016 that eight men own the same wealth as the 3.6 billion people who make up the poorest half of humanity. It is this drive to accumulate wealth that is at the root of most of the world’s problems today.

If we pay attention to what is happening in the news and how elected governments operate, we notice that the rich and their proxies have set the stage for the general population to be distracted with sensational stories that cause us to fight among ourselves. These fights center on race, religion and fear of each other, so we never gain the power required to address the obscene inequality we experience daily.

If migrants are “stealing our jobs,” “racialized immigrants are criminals,” and countries like the US and Canada must “save the people from dictators in other countries,” how will we ever unite to confront the people who profit from starvation and war, inequality, precarious work, migration and crime?

In our capitalist society, people’s real needs come second to the requirements of profit. In effect our society relies on distraction, division and discrimination so that the broader issues of equality and equity are not meaningfully addressed.

Worker-to-worker solidarity is a strategy and a solution to challenge this paradigm.

We are living in a time of crisis but also a time of resistance. CUPE has engaged in worker-to-worker solidarity across borders using the Global Justice Fund for decades. Members have supported and engaged with trade unions and social movements in Colombia, the Philippines, Burma, Cuba, Honduras, Nicaragua, and South Africa at critical moments in their history, and continue to do so in several countries today.

Communities and unions working together have developed relationships and are challenging privatization, contracting-out, and defending Indigenous land and territory against theft from corporate interests.



◀ WORLD SOCIAL FORUM, MONTREAL



Workers are organizing unions with very few resources and under conditions of violence and repression. Women workers in Nicaragua and Honduras with precarious jobs protest regressive labour reform and defend occupational health and safety reform at work. Workers and their communities in the Philippines support initiatives that address the root causes of poverty through national peace negotiations and political transformation. We have a great deal to learn from our partners around the globe.

The Global Justice Fund is available for CUPE members who would like to create opportunities for their local, their division, CUPE council or committee to engage in solidarity where critical global struggles are happening in the world today. We encourage members to participate in the fund; if you have an idea to pitch or a global connection to share please don't hesitate to contact us.

Worker-to-worker solidarity allows for critical exchange and learning with activists struggling in other countries. It is an opportunity to provide necessary material and financial support for the organizing efforts of our sisters and brothers. When we talk to workers and activists in other countries we are better able to understand what is happening in the world, better equipped to challenge discrimination when we are faced with it in our workplaces and communities, and we build the power necessary to create the world we want to live in.



WORKER- TO-WORKER SOLIDARITY

GUATEMALA

The Comité Campesino del Altiplano (CCDA) is a Mayan small farmers and rural workers' movement that works to defend the rights and culture of Indigenous peoples in Guatemala. CUPE participated in a trade union delegation in March 2017, hosted by the CCDA.

The delegation travelled to Guatemala to learn more about the diverse efforts of grassroots organizations to defend the rights of Indigenous communities. The delegation also learned about the movement to improve the

livelihood of Mayan farmers in the country through initiatives based on social justice, political action, and fair trade.

The Mayan people represent over 50 per cent of the population of Guatemala. During the 1980's the Guatemalan army waged an unrelenting war against Mayan communities and social activists. The resilience of the Mayan people is inspiring. Their resistance during the war, and their continuing efforts to defend their Indigenous rights and culture has been remarkable. Despite constant threats, Mayan families continue to demand justice for their missing and murdered family members.

The CCDA was created in 1982 to defend the rights of workers on the large coffee plantations. When the war ended in late 1996 and the peace accords were signed, the CCDA obtained several coffee plantations for its members. Workers run the plantations, and their coffee is processed in several mills that are collectively-owned. The coffee, called "Café Justicia" (Justice Coffee), is sold to Canadians through an extensive network of not-for-profit organizations committed to the principles of solidarity.

The delegation was led by Education in Action, the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) Social Justice Fund, and the Maritime-Guatemala Breaking The Silence (BTS) network.

SOUTH KOREA

An international delegation made up of ten trade union representatives from around the world travelled to South Korea in September 2016 with the goal of supporting the Korean public sector workers' strike, the largest public sector mobilization in their history. National Secretary-Treasurer Charles Fleury led CUPE's delegation and expressed solidarity to thousands of South Korean public sector workers. CUPE was hosted by the Korean Federation of Public Services and Transportation Workers' Unions (KPTU).

This historic public sector mobilization in opposition to neoliberal reforms and in defence of collective bargaining and trade union rights was an opportunity for CUPE to show our solidarity in action. Tens of thousands of workers across the public sector walked off the job and CUPE stood with them in the streets of Seoul, South Korea's capital city.

The international labour delegation was shocked when the Korean government and employers labelled the peaceful and lawful strike illegal for railway workers, and suspended over 800 subway members and union leaders from their jobs. The international delegation spoke against the government and employer practice of refusing workers' proposals to collectively bargain, while using the excuse of maintaining normal services to bring in inexperienced strike-breakers (scabs) in the rail and subways, causing grave dangers to public safety.

The recent impeachment and arrest of the right-wing South Korean President Park Guen-Hye, on allegations of corruption, has provided some reprieve for trade unions in the country now. In the global struggle against neoliberal, anti-worker attacks, the delegation committed to continuing efforts to build international solidarity with our sisters and brothers on the front line in South Korea.



SOUTH KOREA – MASS
WORKER MOBILIZATION ▶

PHILIPPINES

After three years, and a serious escalation of repression in the Philippines, CUPE decided 2016 was an important year to visit our Global Justice partner organizations to gain a better understanding of the changing conditions in the country and to determine how best to be in solidarity. We led a trade union delegation to the Philippines in July 2016.

The delegation participated in the 2nd International Conference on Human Rights and Peace in the Philippines and a solidarity mission to communities most severely affected by military operations and human rights violations in Mindanao and other parts of the country.

The Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT) facilitated our entry in several communities struggling against labour rights violations, housing demolitions, land grabbing and militarization. ACT has a strong presence in the southern Mindanao region of the Philippines, where the five high-profile members of the Indigenous Lumad community, including the director of a tribal school, were killed in 2015 when the military presence increased in the region. Dozens of Lumad schools were forced to halt operations due to military harassment and at least 84 attacks on 57 schools displaced and disrupted the education of over 3,000 Lumad children. They are still struggling to return to their communities today.

The delegation met with our partner organization the Confederation for Unity, Recognition and Advancement of Government Employees (COURAGE), the largest labour confederation in the Philippines, who experienced and continue to fight back against threats, harassment and surveillance of their leaders and organizers.

Following the 2016 election of Philippines President Rodrigo R. Duterte, CUPE National has supported several calls for justice and peace in the country. We have sent letters expressing our support for the resumption of the peace talks between the Government of the Philippines (GPH) and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP), and have called for the release of all political prisoners and for a stop to the so-called “war on drugs” linked extra-judicial killings.

NICARAGUA AND HONDURAS

In May 2016, we participated in CoDevelopment Canada's 2016 Maquila Solidarity Tour to Nicaragua and Honduras. A delegation of ten union sisters travelled to Central America to express solidarity with the maquila workers and organizers in the textile industry where many multinational corporations are exploiting workers. The focus of the tour was health and safety and gender rights.

CUPE has a long history of solidarity with our Global Justice Fund partners and host organizations, María Elena Cuadra Movement of Employed and Unemployed Women (MEC) in Nicaragua and the Honduran Women's Collective (CODEMUH).

MEC is a remarkable organization that has earned a national and regional profile in Nicaragua and





Central America. From their origins as a small group of women organizing underground and facing violent repression for their activism, they have become a respected national organization.

In January 2016, the government passed legislation increasing the minimum wage in the free trade zone by eight per cent in Nicaragua. With a core inflation rate of 5.85 per cent, this raise was important. However, it is also long overdue. In 2015, maquila sector workers received a zero per cent increase while other sectors saw their salaries increase. Given that women represent 75 per cent of workers in the maquila sector, this was a clear example of the systemic discrimination against women that MEC battles against.

The Honduran Women's Collective (CODEMUH) organizes workers to address their immediate needs such as work-related injuries and

illnesses, as well as advocating for workers' rights and systemic change to Honduras' labour laws.

In the City of San Pedro Sula, Honduras, the delegation observed a protest at the Ministry of Labour. Women demanded that the minister follow the Supreme Court order to have ergonomic assessments done in the maquila sector and to review their current 12-hour work shifts. Women workers stood united against a government that does not provide protection from violence or other health and safety violations. They demanded "Jobs Yes, but with Dignity."

The Canadian delegation learned how important it is to experience firsthand the courage and resilience of the women of CODEMUH and MEC, who are fighting for economic and social justice in Honduras and Nicaragua, and raising the standards for workers around the world.

**MEC IS A
REMARKABLE
ORGANIZATION
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A NATIONAL AND
REGIONAL PROFILE
IN NICARAGUA
AND CENTRAL
AMERICA.**



WORLD SOCIAL FORUM

The World Social Forum (WSF) is one of the world's largest gatherings of social movements and civil society.



In August 2016, the WSF brought thousands of activists to Montreal to work in common cause for social justice, democracy, the environment, and international solidarity.

CUPE led a delegation from across the country to the WSF to strategize around a wide range of topics, including the impact of free trade on public health care, “Blue Communities” and public water, collective bargaining, and energy democracy.

One of the main outcomes of the event was a joint declaration calling for an end to austerity budgets and the commodification of public services (privatization). The strengthening of public services was the clearest way to combat rising income inequality and environmental degradation. The growing influence of private finance and the profit motive in health care, education and energy was linked to reduced access to good quality, universal services and to driving down working conditions around the world.

WORLD SOCIAL FORUM, MONTREAL





SOLIDARITY LETTERS AND ACTIONS 2016-2017

CANADA

Letter to Prime Minister Trudeau expressing concern over the Safe Third Country Agreement and the Executive Order issued by United States President Donald Trump on January 27, 2017 Protecting the Nation from Terrorist Attacks by Foreign Nationals.

Letter of concern to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau regarding the violent attacks in Mexico on teachers and their unions defending their rights to proper pedagogical training and effective, formative evaluation principles.

COLOMBIA

Project: Global defence of human rights to build policies for a transformative, holistic and participatory peace in the southwest of Colombia (NOMADESC).

Project: Community support against privatization of water (SINTRACUAVALLE).

CUBA

Project: Strengthening solidarity between Cuban Public Sector Union and CUPE (SNTAP).

HONDURAS

Project: Central America – Empowering women maquila workers, strengthening the Central American Network (CODEMUH).

Project: Empowering women maquila workers in occupational health and safety (CODEMUH).

IRAN

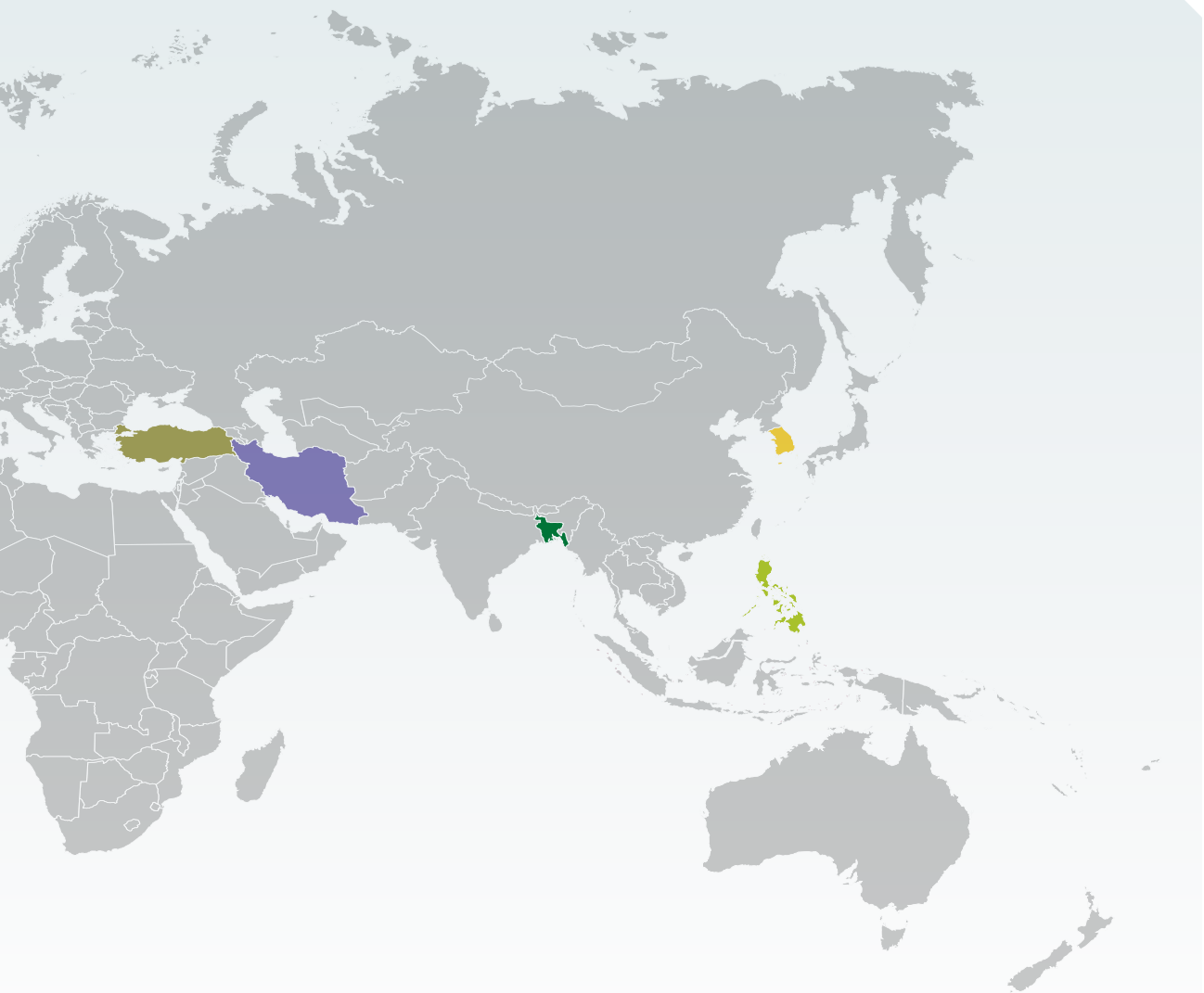
Letter to Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic, His Excellency Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei and the President of the Republic of Iran, Hasan Rouhani, regarding the brutal flogging sentences against 17 Agh Dareh Gold Mine workers in Iran due

to their protest for their right to job security and protection against layoffs.

Letter to His Excellency Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei and President Hassan Rouhani regarding concern over Reza Shahabi returning to jail (now out on bail on a medical leave of absence) after being unjustly arrested, beaten and incarcerated for trade union activity.

NICARAGUA

Project: Taking action to defend the labour and gender rights of women maquila workers (MEC).



PHILIPPINES

Letter of concern to President Rodrigo R. Duterte regarding extra-judicial violence and killings against “suspected” drug dealers.

Open letter to the Negotiating Panel of the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines, strongly supporting the resumption of peace talks.

Letter to the Honorable Benigno Aquino III and Ambassador Petronila P. Garcia, Ambassador of the Philippines.

Project: Worker-to-worker solidarity with the Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT) to build grassroots unionism in the education sector.

Project: Defending human rights in the Philippines: A worker-to-worker solidarity project with COURAGE.

TURKEY

Letter of concern for reinstatement of dismissed and suspended public sector workers.

USA

Letter to Allister Smith, Executive Director of the World Bank Group for Canada, Ireland and the Caribbean raising concerns about recent water privatization initiatives.

BANGLADESH

Statement sent on the third Anniversary of Rana Plaza Building Collapse Dhaka, Bangladesh, April 24, 2013. Safe working conditions.

WALLONIA

Letter to Minister-President Paul Magnette commending the decision to withhold support for CETA.

REPUBLIC OF KOREA

Letter to Ambassador Daeshik Jo, Embassy of the Republic of Korea, regarding CUPE representatives taking part in the international trade delegation to South Korea.

Delegation led by National Secretary-Treasurer Charles Fleury met with officials at the Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Ottawa.



INTERNATIONAL MEETINGS

YASMEEN MIRZA, MEMBER OF CUPE NATIONAL
WOMEN'S COMMITTEE ATTENDING THE UNITED
NATIONS MEETING ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

UN COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Women's Economic Empowerment in the Changing World of Work was the theme of this year's 61st session of the Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW61) in New York in March 2017. The Commission on the Status of Women is a global intergovernmental body dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

CUPE was in New York, with trade unionists from around the world, to engage world leaders on the issues important to unions, social activists, women working in the public sector and to women in communities who rely on public services.

Yasmeen Mirza, member of the CUPE National Women's Committee, presented on the important role unions play in defending public services in a workshop organized by the CLC called *Labour of Love: Unions Advancing Women's Human Rights*. She began her presentation by acknowledging that public services are a source of good jobs for women, and are particularly important because women are more likely to have lower wages, and to live or retire in poverty, and they need the support of quality, affordable public services. She then spoke specifically about CUPE's struggle against privatization and contract-flipping in long-term care centres in Canada, where most workers are women, many of whom are racialized and/or immigrant women.

In their concluding statement, the global labour movement challenged themselves to: *Let us not be satisfied with economic empowerment for women; let us strive instead for **economic justice**: women must have the autonomy to exercise real power and control over their own lives; women must be in a position to organize themselves for change, and governments and employers must respect, protect and fulfil their human right to do so.*

PUBLIC SERVICE INTERNATIONAL

CUPE is an active affiliate with Public Service International (PSI), a global trade union federation representing 20 million workers in 150 countries. In February 2017, CUPE National President Mark Hancock participated in the PSI North America Binational Meeting in Washington, D.C. Given the recent election of Donald Trump, this was an important opportunity for CUPE to express our solidarity with our sisters and brothers in the US and to determine how we can best support them to fight back against the anti-worker legislation that is being introduced. The meeting focused attention on preparations for the PSI World Congress taking place in November 2017.

CUPE staff also participated in sector-based PSI meetings in 2016, including the PSI Global Local and Regional Government Network meeting in Brussels in September 2016, and the Education Support and Cultural Workers' Network meeting in London in December 2016.



TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, former US President Barack Obama and Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto met in Ottawa in June 2016 in what was popularly called the “Three Amigos Summit”. Labour and civil society mobilized in opposition to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade agreement that loomed at the time.

CUPE, working with Common Frontiers (CF), the Trade Justice Network (TJN), the Council of Canadians and the Réseau Québécois sur l'intégration

continentale (RIQC), supported activists from the US and Mexico who came to Canada to share their respective experiences of struggle against free trade. We heard from Victor Suarez, a former member of the Mexican house of representatives and a member of the group Mexico Better Off Without the TPP, as well as Arthur Stamoulis from the US-based Citizens Trade Campaign.

Of particular relevance were the experiences Suarez shared about NAFTA's devastating impact on Mexican workers and the country's economy, as well as the rise of human rights violations. A major consequence of free trade

has been growing food insecurity, leading to massive poverty for small-scale farmers, and waves of migration.

Following the election of US President Donald Trump, the TPP is no longer the threat it once was. The US has left the TPP negotiations but has certainly not abandoned their commitment to free trade. They are now floating the idea of renegotiating NAFTA, which would be in the interest of the US-based corporate sector.

CUPE is clear that Canada must go into any NAFTA renegotiation with a strategy for creating good jobs; manufacturing and services jobs



with decent wages, pensions and benefits. The renegotiation must include the protection of universal and accessible public services, and public infrastructure. We must also stand in solidarity with workers and civil society in the US and Mexico.

CUPE further demands that any NAFTA renegotiation:

- 1) remove NAFTA's investor-rights protections, known as Chapter 11;
- 2) protect public services like health care, energy and public education;
- 3) remove water as a tradable good, service and investment; and

- 4) strengthen labour and environmental protections.

Victor Suarez said every one of the 43 trade deals that have been pitched at Mexico have become a mobilizing opportunity, and have brought continental movements closer together – even in the face of growing violence and repression, and widespread human rights violations. Let us use this moment as another opportunity to build stronger ties with US and Mexican social movements fighting for a better world.

▲
GUATEMALA



MOVING FORWARD

As workers, we must not be divided by forces promoting privatization, racism, islamophobia, forced migration, violence, and war. We must focus instead on the resistance movements in Canada and around the world, and find ways to build alliances and to strengthen our solidarity.

International solidarity is one of the most powerful tools we have to challenge the unjust economic system that is at the heart of the ongoing exploitation and oppression we experience daily in our lives in both simple and complex ways.

Through the Global Justice Fund, we support and engage with strong trade unions and social movement organizations across borders who are courageously organizing the most oppressed and marginalized amongst us, all of whom are suffering the consequences of the same neoliberal policies we face.

We do so with the understanding that our struggle as workers is a shared struggle for justice and dignity globally.

Through project funding, CUPE members have opportunities to build relationships with workers all over the world. We want to

engage with movements that are struggling for jobs and job security, living wages, and safe workplaces, for access to public services and land rights and in opposition to violence and war.

If your local is interested in supporting the CUPE National Global Justice Fund and our international solidarity initiatives please visit cupe.ca/globaljustice, or contact our International Solidarity staff person, Kelti Cameron at kcameron@cupe.ca.



OUR DONORS

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2017,
GUATEMALA ▲

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and alternates 2016 - 2017**

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