

*The ILO Staff Union would like to pay tribute to one of our "longest serving" Regional Representatives for the Americas. Since 2016, Maria Elena Lopez Torres has been working alongside the Union to defend and support colleagues in her region. It was natural for the Staff Union's blog team to interview her to find out how she sees and feels about the years she has been defending and supporting colleagues.*

*What motivated you to join the Union and become a full member?*

I have been an ILO official for 34 years, and for the last 11 years I have been elected by my colleagues as President and Treasurer of the Lima and Andean Countries Staff Union. Since 2016, with the retirement of my colleague Amalia Cuba (who was a Regional Delegate for 12 years), I was elected by the Americas region as a Titular Regional Delegate.

I am motivated to work for the good of my region, to be aware of what is happening in each of the field offices and, above all, to seek alternative solutions to the problems that arise.

*What does trade union involvement mean to you?*

For me, it means a lot, because being a trade union representative implies a great responsibility to be the voice of my colleagues, who trusted me and elected me in recognition of my work.

*What is your assessment of the last few years as a representative of the Americas region?*

The balance has been positive. Although in recent years, our region did not have a Regional Director or Head of Human Resources, which made it more complicated to maintain a permanent and fluid dialogue. However, the colleagues in charge have always given me their support.

In these circumstances, we managed, for example, to finalise in March 2023 a second revision of our local staff selection procedures, which were agreed in October 1992 and had undergone a first revision in August 2010. These procedures, in consultation with the regional trade union team, remain in place and are respected in all offices.

In addition, he highlighted the fact that communication with the SUC at headquarters has always been fluid, and they have been willing to provide support whenever we have needed it.

*Have you encountered any particular obstacles in your region?*

Throughout all these years, I have not encountered any obstacles. The relationship between the Regional Delegate and the Regional Directorate is good and cordial. I have always tried to ensure that the working conditions are the best for all my colleagues in the region.

*What have been your greatest satisfactions since joining the Union as a regional representative?*

I have received a lot of respect for my union work, for which I am grateful, and I look forward to continuing to support my colleagues in the region.

I also hope to support all colleagues in the region in the different situations that arise and to reach a satisfactory solution.

*What message would you like to convey to all colleagues in your region?*

That we continue to work together as a team for the good of our region. Wherever we are, let us seek and secure the best decent working conditions for all our colleagues. Let us strengthen our local committees, foster social dialogue and promote respect for diversity.