

Mr Christian Leffler

Deputy Secretary General for Economic and Global issues
European External Action Service

Ms. Jolita Butkeviciene

Director, Latin America and Caribbean
DG International Cooperation and Development

Brussels, 6 June 2016

Dear Mr Leffler and Ms. Butkeviciene,

Subject: Financial crisis of the regional human rights system in Latin America and the Caribbean

We are writing to you to share our concern about the serious financial crisis facing the regional human rights system in Latin America and the Caribbean and calling on the EU to contribute in finding a solution.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) has recently announced a financial crisis that will have grave consequences on its ability to fulfil its mandate given by the Organization of American States (OAS) members, jeopardizing ongoing hearings and responsiveness in the future. The Commission is one of the principal institutions of protection whose mandate is to promote the compliance of human rights in the region and act as a consultative body of the OAS on the subject. It monitors the obligations of all member states of the OAS in this matter, and is the last line of defense against violations of fundamental rights in the continent.

The Commission is an international reference for its great efforts to protect thousands of human rights defenders of the Americas that live threatened and criminalized. This institution ensures the rights of indigenous peoples, peasants and Afro-descendants, women and girls, among other groups, in their struggle to eradicate discrimination. The role of the Commission, not only in the field of protection but also in their promotion, of human rights reaches almost a billion people across the region.

However, the Commission has had, historically, an insufficient budget –OAS members assigned only 6% of OAS budget to it¹-, leading to the current financial crisis that compromises the effective performance of its core functions and mandate given by the member states of the OAS. The Commission itself announced that on July 31 the contracts of 40% of its staff will be ending as they have no funds or the expectation of receiving them, to renew them. They also reported the suspension of the country visits planned for this year as well as the Sessions 159 and 160, originally scheduled for July and October this year.

From our work in the region we note that the lack of financial support to the Commission poses a greater risk to the life and protection of hundreds of human rights defenders with whom we work, as the sad case of Berta Cáceres exposes. While those who defend human rights in the region increasingly suffer intimidation and violence, it is alarming that the Commission receives

¹ <http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/mandato/finanzas/RecursosFinancieros-2011-2016.pdf>

very limited financial support from the governments in Latin America who founded it as well as decreasing contributions from Permanent Observers countries and the European Union.

Ahead of the next General Assembly of the OAS foreseen on 13-15 June in Santo Domingo, we call on the EU to:

1. Commit to significantly increase 2016 EU's own support to the IACHR through the instruments and mechanisms available to address the urgent financial crisis by June 15;
2. Lead a coordinated response by the EU member states that are also permanent observers reaffirming a joint EU commitment to the IACHR.
3. Dialogue with the member states of the OAS to fulfill its commitments to support and strengthen the system they created themselves by increasing the 6% of the OAS budget and giving voluntary contributions;
4. Foster the discussion towards a long-term mechanism that sustains the Inter-American human rights institutions in a sustainable manner.

We remain available for any further exchange you might require on the above issues.

Yours sincerely,



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