

PRESS RELEASE – THE OBSERVATORY

Inter-American Commission on Human Rights establishes an Office of the Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders

Geneva-Paris, April 7, 2011 The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), welcomes the decision of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to establish an Office of the Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) concluded its 141st regular session on April 1, 2011 during which it announced the establishment of an Office of the Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders. The Rapporteur will be Commissioner José de Jesús Orozco Henríquez.

Different human rights organisations had requested the IACHR to establish an effective mechanism to offer more protection to human rights defenders. Since 2008, the Observatory has pursued efforts to reinforce the interaction and complementarity between international and regional mechanisms and institutions for the protection of human rights defenders through “inter-mechanism” meetings, in which IACHR has been actively participating.

The Office of the Rapporteur will foster a greater support and visibility to the work and the contribution of human rights defenders and justice operators - who are also included in the mandate - in constructing a democratic society.

The IACHR decided to establish a Rapporteur in view of the number of complaints received, denouncing the difficult situation of human rights defenders in different Latin American countries. According to the information presented by the civil society during the hearings in Washington D.C., aggressions and cases of harassment against human rights defenders committed or tolerated by state agents are numerous. The NGOs denounced, among other issues, the increase of illegitimate state intelligence activities, as well as the emergence of new forms of harassment against human rights defenders committed by the organised crime and companies with economic interests in the region.

Likewise, the Observatory has been documenting killings, acts of harassment, threats, arbitrary detentions, attacks against the physical and psychological integrity, information thefts, judicial harassment, and other violations against human rights defenders in Latin America.

The Observatory welcomes the IACHR decision to establish an Office of the Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, and hopes it will contribute to encourage states to take action for guaranteeing the safety of human rights defenders according to international law and through effective measures of prevention, protection, and investigation, in order to improve the conditions in which human rights defenders in Latin America have to carry out their work.

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