

**THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS
WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION OF THE AMERICAN STATES (OAS)**

Press release on the creation of the “Special Unit on Defenders” within the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), 7th December 2001¹

The Executive Secretary of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), Dr. Santiago A. Canton, decided to create a Human Rights Defenders Functional Unit within the Office of the Executive Secretary to coordinate the activities of the Executive Secretariat in this field.

The Unit’s main function will be to receive information regarding the situation of human rights defenders in the Hemisphere, keep in touch with nongovernmental and governmental organizations, and coordinate the work of the Executive Secretariat with regard to human rights defenders in the Americas.

This initiative takes into account resolution AG/RES. 1818 (XXXI-O/01), adopted by the General Assembly of the OAS at its thirty-first regular session, which requests the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to continue to pay due attention to the situation of human rights defenders in the Americas and to consider preparing a comprehensive study in this area, which, inter alia, describes their work, for study by the pertinent political authorities.

The Executive Secretary said this was an important step to protect the rights of those whose fundamental mission it is to defend the human rights of all human beings disinterestedly, risking their own lives and safety in the process.

Any communication may be sent to IACHR headquarters or by e-mail to CIDHDefensores@oas.org or fax : + 1 202 458 39 92.

Resolution AG/RES 2036 (XXXIV-O/04) adopted by the General Assembly of the OEA, on 8th June 2004

“Human rights defenders in the Americas: support for the individuals, groups, and organizations of civil society working to promote and protect human rights in the Americas”²

The General Assembly,

Having seen the Annual Report of the Permanent Council to the General Assembly (AG/doc.4265/04 add. 3 corr. 1) as it pertains to this topic and resolution AG/RES. 1920 (XXXIII-O/03), “Human Rights Defenders: Support for the Individuals, Groups, and Civil Society Organizations Working to Promote and Protect Human Rights in the Americas”;

Concerned that situations persist in the Americas that, directly or indirectly, prevent or hamper the work of individuals, groups, or organizations working to protect and promote fundamental rights;

Considering that member states support the work carried out by human rights defenders and recognize their valuable contribution to the promotion, observance, and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the Americas, and to the representation and defense of individuals, minorities, and other groups of persons whose rights are threatened or violated;

Taking note that in 2003, in its decisions granting provisional measures, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights highlighted the importance of the work of human rights defenders to the development of democracies in the Americas;

Taking into account the work accomplished by the Unit for Human Rights Defenders of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the member states’ replies to the questionnaire drawn up by that unit with a view to preparing a comprehensive report on the

¹ Press Release no. 32/01. www.oas.org/OASpage/press2002/sp/año99/año2001/diciembre01/CIDH12701-32.htm.

² www.oea.org/default.htm

subject; and

Underscoring that the performance by human rights defenders of their tasks contributes actively to strengthening democratic institutions and improving national human rights systems,

Resolves:

1. To reiterate its support for the work carried out, at both the national and regional levels, by human rights defenders; and to recognize their valuable contribution to the promotion, observance, and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the Hemisphere.

2. To condemn actions that directly or indirectly prevent or hamper the work of human rights defenders in the Americas.

3. To encourage human rights defenders to continue to work selflessly for the enhancement of national human rights systems for the consolidation of democracy, in accordance with the principles contained in the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

4. To urge member states to continue stepping up their efforts to adopt the necessary measures to safeguard the lives, freedom, and personal safety of human rights defenders, and to conduct thorough and impartial investigations in all cases of violations against human rights defenders, ensuring that the findings thereof are transparent and publicized.

5. To invite the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) to conclude its comprehensive report on the situation of human rights defenders in the Americas, in keeping with resolution AG/RES. 1842 (XXXII-O/02), for presentation to the Permanent Council and consideration, if possible, in the second half of 2004.

6. To request the IACHR to:

- a. Continue to give due consideration to this matter at the level it deems appropriate;
- b. Continue intensifying its dialogue and cooperation with the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on Human Rights Defenders; and
- c. Include in its annual report a section on the work of the Unit for Human Rights Defenders of the IACHR.

7. To invite member states to promote the dissemination and enforcement of the instruments of the inter-American system and the decisions of its bodies on this matter, as well as the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

8. To invite member states to consider the preparation and implementation of national plans to apply the principles contained in the United Nations Declaration mentioned in the preceding paragraph, for which purpose they may also request the advisory services of the IACHR.

9. To urge member states that have not yet done so to reply to the questionnaire prepared by the Unit for Human Rights Defenders of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

10. To request the Permanent Council to report to the General Assembly at its thirty-fifth regular session on the implementation of this resolution, which will be carried out in accordance with the resources allocated in the program-budget of the Organization and other resources.