

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **OAS: Time to face up to the human rights challenge**

The states of the Americas cannot carry on ignoring the need to improve human rights protection and promotion, Amnesty International said today, while reiterating its deeply-held conviction that human rights and democracy are inseparable and that it is impossible to have democracy if human rights are not fully respected.

The statement was issued on the occasion of the forthcoming session of the General Assembly of the Organization of American States to be held in San José, Costa Rica, from 3 to 5 June.

“There is no option but to face up to the challenge of improving the human rights situation in the continent because many sectors of the American peoples are seeing their rights violated or denied,” the organization continued.

In particular, unacceptable practices such as disappearances, extrajudicial executions, torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment have still not been eradicated. In several countries of the region the inhumane and unreasonable use of the death penalty persists and the many cases of blatant impunity that still exist make it difficult for victims to obtain justice and undermine confidence in the rule of law.

“Governments need to urgently address the situation and work closely with other actors within their societies, including human rights defenders, who have an invaluable and essential contribution to make in ensuring that national and inter-American mechanisms for human rights protection are effective,” Amnesty International said.

“Unfortunately, on a daily basis human rights defenders in several parts of the region are confronted with serious risks and obstacles which prevent them from carrying out their vital work,” the organization pointed out.

Although the importance of the role of human rights defenders has been recognized both within the framework of the United Nations system as well as by the OAS, Amnesty International believes that it is not enough.

The organization is urging the OAS General Assembly to pass a resolution calling on

the Inter-American Commission to carry out a study into the situation of human rights defenders and to have a permanent chapter in its annual reports devoted to the issue of defenders. At the same time, the Assembly should urge governments to ensure that the Commission has all the facilities it needs to investigate the situation of defenders when it visits their respective countries.

As a means of fostering progress with the system of human rights protection, Amnesty International is first of all urging the states of the Americas to take steps to ensure they are fully complying with all inter-American human rights treaties, especially the American Convention on Human Rights and its two related protocols concerning the death penalty and economic, social and cultural rights; the Inter-American Convention to Prevent and Punish Torture; the Inter-American Convention on Forced Disappearance of Persons; and the Inter-American Convention for the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women.

“In addition, those states which have not already done so should ratify the Rome Statute concerning the International Criminal Court which is an important tool in the struggle against impunity,” Amnesty International stated.

The organization is also calling on governments to make progress in drawing up an Inter-American Convention against Racism and All Forms of Discrimination and Intolerance and to adopt the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child concerning the participation of children in armed conflicts, which enables states to commit themselves to ensuring that any form of recruitment for children under 18 is outlawed and that, from 18 onwards, only voluntary recruitment is permitted.

“Another basic step towards bringing about full respect for human rights in the continent would be to strengthen the Inter-American Human Rights Protection System,” Amnesty International added, while calling on governments to increase the budget given to the Commission and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and to enable them to function on a permanent basis.

“The states of the Americas must also put into place corresponding mechanisms to monitor, follow up and strengthen the recommendations made by the Court and Commission of Human Rights and ensure that the Permanent Council and the OAS General Assembly itself are closely involved in such work,” the organization added.

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