

## **Americas Summit: Time for concrete action on human rights**

*As governments from across the American continent meet in Québec City from 20 to 22 April for their third regional Summit, Amnesty International is calling for human rights to be placed at the heart of the debate and at the forefront of their action.*

*"Despite the many commitments made by governments, serious human rights violations continue in virtually every country in the region, from Canada to the Southern Cone, across the Caribbean and Central America," said Javier Zúñiga, Amnesty International's Program Director for the Americas.*

*"As Americas leaders gather to discuss, among other things, the strengthening of democracy in the region, they should remember that there can be no true democracy if people are denied their fundamental human rights -- the right to life and physical integrity, the right to a fair trial, the right to speak up for the rights of all without fear of retaliation."*

*Amnesty International's concerns range from widespread reports of police brutality and excessive use of force -- too often resulting in death -- to arbitrary arrests and detentions, harsh and degrading prison conditions, the death penalty and human rights violations against ethnic and sexual minorities, women and indigenous people.*

*"Although torture should by now be consigned to the history books, it continues to be an everyday reality for thousands of men, women and children detained in prisons, jails and police stations," added Mr. Zúñiga, referring to Amnesty International's global campaign against torture.*

*"It is time for the region's governments to take concrete action to stop human rights violations and put an end to the widespread impunity that shelters their perpetrators."*

*"To this end, it is essential to strengthen the inter-American system of human rights protection by providing the Inter-American Commission and Court of Human Rights with adequate human and financial resources and means to follow-up on their decisions."*

*Amnesty International is also stressing the importance of the role of human rights defenders and other sectors of civil society, whose constant vigilance and dedication is crucial to hold governments to account in respect to their promises and commitments to respect the rights of their citizens. This was also recognised by the General Assembly of the Organization of American States in a series of resolutions over the past two years.*

*"Human rights defenders have often paid with their life or their freedom for their commitment to the protection and promotion of the rights of all," Mr. Zúñiga said. "Governments must acknowledge their vital role and take all necessary measures to recognise and support their work, making sure there are appropriate fora for their participation in the political process."*

*"The governments represented at this summit have an obligation to respect the rights of their peoples and to adhere to international human rights standards. Make no mistake, while human rights violations continue to be committed, Amnesty International will continue to hold governments accountable and demand justice," Mr. Zúñiga concluded.*

## **Background**

The first Americas Summit in Miami in 1994 was intended to be used as a forum for the participating governments to discuss the most important issues faced by the continent and to set their agenda for the next decade.

The Miami Summit and the subsequent one in Santiago, Chile, both took as main themes the strengthening of democracy and the promotion of economic growth.

In 1994, participating states and governments affirmed their commitment to a Plan of Action which included the promotion and protection of human rights. Governments agreed to give serious consideration to, amongst others, the adherence to international human rights instruments; cooperate fully with UN and inter-American human rights bodies; develop programs for the promotion and observance of human rights, including those affecting women and children; take the necessary steps to remedy inhumane conditions in prisons; further strengthen the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights

In spite of this Plan of Action and the stated commitments to human rights made at previous Summits, Amnesty International continues to have widespread human rights concerns in the region, as detailed in a document prepared on the occasion of the Québec Summit, *Americas: Putting human rights on the agenda*. The report is available through the Amnesty International press office or on the web at <http://www.web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/index/amr010012001>.

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