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Americas: Human rights are being undermined by OAS member states

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By turning their back on serious and unacceptable problems that the General Assembly of the Organization of American States should be addressing, governments are putting the very credibility of the body at risk, Amnesty International said during the Assembly's meeting in the Dominican Republic.

"It is particularly worrying that while the official focus of General Assembly discussions is on the theme of 'Good Governance and Development in the Knowledge-based Society', hundreds of thousands of people throughout the region are still suffering severely because of member states' poor commitment to human rights," said Hugo Rodríguez Brignardello, who is attending the event as an Amnesty International observer.

At a time when the OAS is drafting a convention to combat discrimination, the Dominican Republic has rejected a judgement by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in which two girls of Haitian origin born in the Dominican Republic were found to have suffered discrimination because they had been denied the right to nationality and other related rights.

"The facts of this case illustrate the severe problems of racial discrimination and intolerance faced by Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent in the Dominican Republic," said Hugo Rodríguez Brignardello.

According to Amnesty International, racial discrimination in the Dominican Republic is also evident in the thousands of cases of people living with HIV/AIDS, especially Haitian migrants and Dominicans of Haitian descent.

Amnesty International's concerns are not confined to the Dominican Republic. The organization has documented serious human rights violations throughout the Americas, including appalling conditions of detention, extrajudicial executions, excessive use of force, violence against women and indigenous communities, harassment and attacks directed at human rights defenders, discrimination, racism and a failure to comply with the rule of law. Economic, social and cultural rights are also denied throughout the region, contributing to the terrible levels of poverty.

"The Organization of American States has a duty to get seriously and deeply involved in the grave problems

afflicting the region by putting forward effective alternatives to deal with them rather than empty rhetoric. Its very legitimacy depends on it," said Hugo Rodríguez Brignardello.

Amnesty International also expressed concern at the obstacles that are still standing in the way of real and genuine participation on the part of civil society in the discussions of the Organization of American States and called on the organization to increase its transparency.

Background Information

The Organization of American States (OAS) is holding its 36th General Assembly in the city of Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, between 4 and 6 June 2006. As in previous years, Amnesty International is attending as a special observer and is taking the opportunity to reiterate its concerns and proposals for strengthening human rights protection.

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