



Ottawa, May 16, 2017

**The Honourable Chrystia Freeland
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Ottawa (Ontario)
Canada
K1A 0A6**

SUBJECT: Financing of the Inter-American Human Rights System

Dear Minister:

The Americas Policy Group, a working group of the Canadian Council for International Cooperation that represents 34 civil society organizations working on development and human rights in the Americas, wishes to draw your attention to a situation of concern that could have serious adverse consequences for the protection of the rule of law, democracy and human rights throughout the Americas.

The APG is concerned by the recurring financial problems faced by the Inter-American Human Rights System (“IAHRS” or “the System”), which is of vital importance to the quest for justice, safeguarding of human rights and the fight against impunity across the region, in particular for women, Indigenous peoples and other marginalized groups. APG members and their partner organizations – who represent and assist victims of human rights abuses who have had to turn to the IAHRS for protection, truth, justice and redress as a last resort – believe it is essential to provide the IAHRS with adequate resources to ensure it has the capacity to fulfil its mandate. For years, the System has had to function with less than half the funds it requires to discharge its mandate in a satisfactory manner. It is significantly underfunded when compared to other regional human rights systems.

On May 30, 2016, in a letter addressed to former Minister Stéphane Dion, the APG conveyed its concerns to the Canadian government, urging it to throw its support behind collective initiatives aimed at providing the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights with the resources it needed to implement its new strategic plan.

On March 14th 2017, APG members met with Global Affairs officials at the Division for Hemispheric Relations. On that occasion, APG representatives were told that the Canadian government shares the view that the work done by both the Inter-American Commission and the Inter-American Court on Human Rights is crucial, that the current financial basis of the System is not sustainable, and that the calls for reform are justified.

Global Affairs Canada officials also mentioned that the Canadian government considers that the question of the funding of the IAHRs cannot be addressed in isolation of broader concerns regarding overall financial management challenges faced by the OAS. In their view, the OAS is in desperate need of a major administrative reform. Yet, APG representatives left the room with the impression that Canada would not oppose a proposal aimed at increasing the budget of the IAHRs within the parameters of the current OAS budget.

Given your government's positive appreciation of the IAHRs record, the APG was therefore disturbed to learn that, in the lead up to the next OAS General Assembly, which is to take place in Mexico on June 19-21, 2017, Canada has reportedly opposed discussion of a proposal sponsored by the host country which aims at doubling the budget of the IAHRs within the next two years. Indeed, together with Brazil, we understand that Canada has suggested that the debate on this new financial scheme for the IAHRs be deferred until the Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Affairs has concluded its discussions on the program-budget of the Organization as a whole. The effect of Canada's proposal would be the postponement of urgent and decisive action needed to bolster and strengthen the IAHRs.

While the [Commission has publicly declared as early as May 2016](#) that the extent of the financial crisis was such that it could be forced to lay off half of its workforce unless additional funds were granted to it, the OAS has so far failed to seriously address this deeply troubling situation, although General Assemblies took place in June and October 2016.

The APG appreciates the fact that the OAS may very well need to undergo a substantial administrative and financial reform process. However, we are concerned the position of Canada will delay the financial support desperately and urgently needed in the interim by the Inter-American System. Ultimately, those who will suffer the consequences of such inaction will be none other than the survivors of human rights abuses, their families, and courageous frontline defenders working against great odds and in the face of considerable peril to uphold human rights in their communities.

We hope Canada will change its position and support the resolution sponsored by the host country at the next OAS General Assembly. Canada can play a leadership role in the promotion and protection of human rights in the Americas.

Sincerely,



Rachel Vincent
Co-chair
APG



Steve Stewart
Co-chair
APG

c.c. Jeremy Broadhurst,
 Andrew Shore