

OPENING REMARKS

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President, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights

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I am very pleased to welcome you here today to participate in a working session organized by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the International Justice Project on the topic of implementing international human rights protections. Gathered together on this occasion are international experts and government representatives from across our Hemisphere and from around the world, for an opportunity to share their ideas and experiences on applying international human rights protections within the domestic systems and institutions of states.

The Inter-American Commission and the International Justice Project organized this event out of a shared commitment to enhancing the implementation and impact of international human rights protections and standards. For its part, the Inter-American Commission has through its reports, statements, promotional work and other activities consistently emphasized the importance of respect by OAS Member States for their human rights obligations in this system and its willingness to cooperate with member states in this endeavor. As Commissioner Juan Méndez observed when presenting the Commission's 2001 Annual Report to the Permanent Council's Committee on Juridical and Political Affairs last April, the inter-American human rights system should be seen as an ally of countries, aiding them in their efforts to safeguard human dignity and consolidate the rule of law, and not as an adversary or obstacle. Viewed in this light, it is appropriate, and indeed essential, for the states and institutions of the inter-American system to work together in improving compliance with the standards that the system was created to guarantee.

The International Justice Project has also adopted as a central part of its mandate the development, coordination and increased employment of international law and human rights standards. By providing technical assistance to attorneys, international and national organizations and foreign entities, coordinating efforts to promote the employment of international law and human rights standards, and acting as a clearinghouse for comprehensive, accurate and timely information, the International Justice Project endeavors to enhance the knowledge, advancement and utilization of international human rights standards in the domestic legal systems of states.

It is also clear from the activities of the political organs of the system that OAS Member States share these objectives and concerns. Through the pronouncements of the OAS General Assembly and the Summit of the Americas process, Member States have declared their commitment to strengthening the inter-American human rights system. In doing so, States have specifically recognized that achieving this objective requires them to undertake a number of concrete initiatives, which include adopting such legislative or other measures as are necessary to ensure the application of inter-American human rights provisions within the states, and taking the necessary steps to comply with the decisions or judgments of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and follow up on the recommendations of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

It is in the context of these shared and interrelated goals that we have brought all of you together

for a full and stimulating program of presentations and discussions. The day has been divided into four panels of knowledgeable governmental and nongovernmental experts. The first of these panels will provide an overview of the issues, problems and challenges raised by the topic of the working session. This will be followed by three panels addressing particular aspects of the implementation issue, namely legislative, judicial and intergovernmental mechanisms for complying with international human rights obligations and protections. Opportunities for questions and discussions between participants and panelists have also been incorporated into the program, together with a luncheon and a reception to conclude the event.

There is no doubt that the domestic implementation of international standards and protections can present legal and practical challenges for states. Unless these challenges are overcome, however, the full potential of the regional and international systems for the protection of human rights, which states themselves have created, will never be realized. It is our hope that the present session will provide a valuable forum for meeting some of these challenges.

We will now convene our opening panel. Thank you.