

IACHR and UN Rapporteurs commit to collaboration and call on States to protect human rights defenders

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At an IACHR working meeting in Washington, Michel Forst and José de Jesús Orozco committed to better protect human rights defenders through joint actions.



(Washington DC) - At the 153rd Period of Sessions of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) in Washington DC, the IACHR Rapporteur on the rights of human rights defenders, Commissioner José de Jesús Orozco Henríquez, and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Michel Forst, held a [working meeting](#) in which they committed to strengthen collaboration between their two mandates in order to provide better attention to human rights defenders.

'This is an important commitment which can exponentially increase the potential of both mandates,' said ISHR's Eleanor Openshaw. 'ISHR has consistently advocated for greater collaboration between the UN and regional human rights systems and we hope this commitment can be replicated across other special procedures and mechanisms'.

Both Rapporteurs condemned the widespread killings, threats, harassment and criminalisation of defenders in various countries across the region, as well as the failure of States to effective measures by for defenders at risk. They also took the opportunity to condemn reprisals against activists interacting with the systems they represent.

Forst said 'I am extremely concerned with the increasing number of acts of intimidation and reprisals against human rights defenders in connection with their engagement with the United Nations human rights mechanisms or with regional organizations. These reprisals take the form of smear campaigns, travel bans, harassment, intimidation, direct threats, physical attacks and killings. We therefore urgently need to put an end to all forms of intimidation and reprisals against defenders who cooperate with the United Nations and the IACHR'.

Orozco, meanwhile, highlighted that, 'it is urgent that States ensure that human rights defenders can exercise the right to defend human rights and that States refrain from imposing restrictions that hinder defenders' work. In addition, it is necessary to move forward with national legislation that establishes mechanisms for the protection human rights defenders and to ensure their effectiveness'.

The meeting came towards the end of a week in which the IACHR hosted [several public hearings](#) underlining the vulnerability of human rights defenders in the region, including one - convened by the Commission itself - on the [criminalisation of defenders](#). Videos of all the public hearings can be found online [here](#).

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