

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

April 5, 2017

Dear Secretary Tillerson:

Our organizations write you to express our deep disappointment in the failure of the United States to participate in hearings held before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) on March 21, 2017, during the IACHR's 161st Period of Sessions in Washington, D.C. The undersigned organizations were participants in the hearings.

The United States' absence at these hearings breaks with at least two decades of uninterrupted participation and calls into question this administration's commitment to protecting human rights within the United States and abroad. The IACHR has played a historic role in the region, fighting impunity and exposing the myriad human rights violations committed during the dictatorships and civil wars of the second half of the twentieth century, among others. Since the creation of the Organization of American States (OAS), the United States under both Republican and Democratic administrations has supported the Inter-American System for the protection of human rights and its essential institutions including the IACHR. While the United States has often failed to fully implement its human rights obligations, it has participated in hearings before the Commission to respond to allegations of human rights violations committed by the United States, including on issues around which litigation was pending. The United States has also facilitated official IACHR visits and responded to petitions and requests for precautionary measures.

We strongly caution this administration against an isolationist policy of disengagement with regional and international human rights bodies. Indeed, this tactic is characteristic of authoritarian regimes, not of democratic nations committed to universal human rights. The United States' absence at the hearings sets a dangerous and counterproductive precedent for all Member States of the OAS and detracts from efforts to address human rights violations and to protect vulnerable populations, migrants, and Indigenous Peoples both in the United States and throughout the region.

We therefore call upon this administration to reaffirm the United States' commitment to protect and defend human rights through meaningful engagement with international human rights bodies, such as the IACHR. Leaders around the world, democratic and authoritarian, are watching to see how the United States meets and fulfills its international legal obligations and

commitments on human rights. Under your leadership as Secretary of State, the United States must not shirk these responsibilities.

Respectfully,

American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC)
American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
Harvard Immigration and Refugee Clinical Program
Hope Border Institute
Human Rights First (HRF)
Innovation Law Lab
Institute for Women in Migration (IMUMI)
International Indian Treaty Council
International Justice Resource Center
Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States
Kino Border Initiative
Latin America Working Group (LAWG)
Southern Border Communities Coalition (SBCC)
Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)
Women's Refugee Commission (WRC)

Hearing participants signing on in an individual capacity (title and organizational affiliation listed for identification purposes only):

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