



OAS » Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) » About the IACHR » What is the IACHR?

What is the IACHR?

The IACHR is a principal and autonomous organ of the Organization of American States ("OAS") whose mission is to promote and protect human rights in the American hemisphere. It is composed of seven independent members who serve in a personal capacity. Created by the OAS in 1959, the Commission has its headquarters in Washington, D.C. Together with the Inter-American Court of Human Rights ("the Court" or "the I/A Court H.R."), installed in 1979, the Commission is one of the institutions within the inter-American system for the protection of human rights ("IAHRS").

The formal beginning of the IAHRS was approval of the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man at the Ninth International Conference of American States held in Bogota in 1948. There the OAS Charter (hereinafter "the Charter") was adopted, which declares that one of the principles upon which the Organization is founded is the "fundamental rights of the individual."

Full respect for human rights appears in several sections of the Charter, underscoring the importance that the Member States attach to it. In the words of the Charter, "the true significance of American solidarity and good neighborliness can only mean the consolidation on this continent, within the framework of democratic institutions, of a system of individual liberty and social justice based on respect for the essential rights of man." The Charter establishes the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) as one of the principal organs of the OAS whose function is to promote the observance and protection of human rights and to serve as a consultative organ of the Organization in these matters.

The work of the IACHR rests on three main pillars:

- the individual petition system;
- monitoring of the human rights situation in the Member States, and
- the attention devoted to priority thematic areas.

Operating within this framework, the Commission considers that inasmuch as the rights of all persons subject to the jurisdiction of the Member States are to be protected, special attention must be devoted to those populations, communities and groups that have historically been the targets of discrimination. However, the Commission's work is also informed by other principles, among them the following: the pro homine principle, whereby a law must be interpreted in the manner most advantageous to the human being; the necessity of access to justice, and the inclusion of the gender perspective in all Commission activities.

Contact Us

Inter-American Commission on Human Rights

1889 F St., NW,
Washington, D.C., USA 20006

E-mail: cidhoea@oas.org
Telephone: (202) 370-9000
Fax: (202)458-3992

Brief History of the Inter-American Human Rights System

The inter-American human rights system was born with the adoption of the [American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man](#) in Bogotá, Colombia in April of 1948. The American Declaration was the first international human rights instrument of a general nature. The IACHR was created in 1959 and held its first session in 1960. Since that time and until 2009, the Commission has held 134 sessions, some of them at its headquarters, others in different countries of the Americas.

By 1961, the IACHR had begun to carry out on-site visits to observe the general human rights situation in a country or to investigate specific situations. Since that time, the IACHR has carried out 69 visits to 23 member States. In relation to its visits for the observation of the general human rights situation of a country, the IACHR has published 44 special [country reports](#) to date.

In 1965, the IACHR was expressly authorized to examine complaints or petitions regarding specific cases of human rights violations. Up until 1997, the IACHR has received thousands of petitions, which have resulted in 12,000 cases which have been processed or are currently being processed. (The procedure for the processing of individual cases is described below). The final published reports of the IACHR regarding these individual cases may be found in the [Annual Reports](#) of the Commission or independently by country.

In 1969, [the American Convention on Human Rights](#) was adopted. The Convention entered into force in 1978. As of August of 1997, it has been ratified by 25 countries: Argentina, Barbados, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay and Venezuela. The Convention defines the human rights which the ratifying States have agreed to respect and ensure. The Convention also creates the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and defines the functions and procedures of both the Commission and the Court. The IACHR also possesses additional faculties which pre-date and are not derived directly from the Convention, such as the processing of cases involving countries which are still not parties to the Convention.

[More Information »](#)