

UN-Americas action plan seeks to strengthen protection of human rights defenders in region

26 October 2017 – The United Nations human rights office and its counterpart in the Americas have launched a new and deeper cooperation plan to address one of the most pressing problems in that region – the protection of human rights defenders.

Human rights defenders are vital for the healthy functioning of societies, and yet in recent years they have been [increasingly targeted](#) in the Americas, said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein in a news release.

They are subjected to threats, smear campaigns, arbitrary arrest, ill-treatment, and even torture. Many run the risk of violent, even fatal attacks, including by private individuals linked to business interests or powerful criminal gangs, he added.

Joint Action Mechanism to Contribute to the Protection of Human Rights Defenders in the Americas was launched Wednesday by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)) and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), a principal and autonomous organ of the Organization of American States.

In 2016, three out of every four recorded murders of human rights defenders worldwide took place in the Americas, and 41 per cent of these killings were of people standing up against extractive or development projects, or defending the right to land and natural resources of indigenous peoples, according to the release.

Amid continuing impunity for perpetrators, we are seeing a worrying trend of the law being misused to criminalize the activities of human rights defender to silence them or punish them, said IACHR Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders José de Jesús Orozco.

This is one of the reasons why the launch of our joint action mechanism is so important and timely as, by acting together and systematically, we can have a greater impact, he added.

The joint action mechanism will strengthen the two organs' already extensive cooperation on emblematic human rights cases and situations of particular concern, building on their national, regional and international capacities, drawing on their complementary strengths and creating stronger connections between their staff.

Among the specific actions that are planned, IACHR and OHCHR will study the measures countries in the region have in place to protect human rights

defenders, and produce a manual of best practices.