

Five-year Strategy for the Caribbean

2023-2027

IACHR Inter-American
Commission on
Human Rights



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Five-Year Strategy for the Caribbean

Strategic Plan
2023 - 2027

INTER-AMERICAN COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

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Objective

Program 17: Priority attention to the Caribbean

Goal: To promote greater understanding and use of the IACHR

Pillar One/Intermediate Outcome (IO):
Increased protection and defense of victims of human rights violations

Pillar Two/IO:
Greater observance of and guarantees of human rights in the sub-region by states

Pillar Three/IO:
Improved institutional culture in the IACHR with an appreciation of the Caribbean and with a human rights-based approach.

The ultimate goal of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights' (IACHR) Strategic Plan 2023-2027 is to achieve greater enjoyment of all human rights by all in the Hemisphere. The Commission prioritizes the Caribbean under Program 17 of its Strategic Plan, the major goal of which is to promote greater understanding and engagement with the IACHR. This goal has external and internal dimensions that correspond to the three pillars or intermediate outcomes of IACHR's Strategic Plan. The Caribbean Strategy is developed around these three pillars of IACHR's Plan.

At the external level, pillar one focuses on increased protection and the defense of

victims of human rights violations, with special attention to historically excluded groups, as well as greater observance of and guarantees of human rights in the sub-region by states, which is highlighted in pillar two.

At the internal level, pillar three focuses on an improved institutional culture in the IACHR with an appreciation of the Caribbean and with a human rights-based approach. This approach is expected to increase access to IACHR mechanisms for those who have been historically excluded, to enhance the mechanisms into a gender inter-sectional and results-based management, and to improve the management of human and financial resources from a human rights perspective.

Process for developing the Strategy

Consultation with Stakeholders

A participatory human rights-based approach was adopted in preparing this Strategy. **The note takes account of previous bilateral meetings with CARICOM States and non-state actors from 2020 to the present time, as well as meetings during various periods of sessions**, and internal consultations with staff, the Special Rapporteurships for Economic, Social, Cultural and Environmental Rights and for Freedom of Expression, as well as with all Thematic Rapporteurships on their work plans and strategy for the Caribbean.

Review of proposals and consolidation of the Strategy

This information was used to formulate the cross-cutting issues of the five-year strategy for the Caribbean and to develop a coordinated and inter-sectional approach outlined in this Strategy. In this regard, each Unit and Rapporteurship designated a Focal Point for issues relating to the Caribbean.

Pillar one

Pillar One/Intermediate Outcome (IO): Increased protection and defense of victims of human rights violations

Strategic objectives

Increase access to inter-American justice, particularly for historically excluded people

Strengthen protection for individuals by states against the risk of serious, imminent, and irreparable harm to human rights.

Promote compliance with the recommendations and standards of the inter-American human rights system.

Programs¹

Increase technical assistance and capacity building to increase submissions of petitions and cases to ensure timely justice and the development of standards with a structural impact on the protection of human rights for historically excluded people

Increase capacity building and technical assistance with strengthening applications for precautionary measures for historically excluded persons.

Provide technical assistance and capacity building to strengthen recommendations' follow-up and Inter-American SIMORE.

Provide technical cooperation and capacity building to states to promote better protection of the rights of citizens, as well as to non-state actors to encourage a more effective implementation of the human rights aspects of their mandates.

Priority will be given to cross-cutting issues such as democratic institutionalization, institutional strengthening, access to timely justice, and the promotion of Inter-American Standard

¹ Programs referenced in this Strategy are those that are contained in IACHR's Strategic Plan 2023-2027.

Since 2019, IACHR Annual reports have repeatedly recorded human rights challenges characterized mainly by: violations against historically excluded groups, high levels of gender-based violence, poor access to justice and violence and security. **At the external level, under pillar one, the IACHR will focus on increased protection and defense of victims of human rights violations, with special attention to historically excluded groups.** The strategic objectives under this pillar are: to increase access to inter-American justice, particularly for historically excluded people; strengthen protection for individuals by states against the risk of serious, imminent, and irreparable harm to human rights; and to promote compliance with the recommendations and standards of the inter-American human rights system.

Increase access to inter-American justice, particularly for historically excluded people

Over the years, the IACHR established 11 thematic rapporteurships² and two special rapporteurships³ to strengthen and promote its work on issues affecting historically excluded population groups, communities, and peoples. Recent work in the Caribbean⁴, monitoring data, information gathered during visits, the relatively small number of petitions and cases, requests for precautionary measures, and public hearings that were submitted, as well as consultations with states and non-state actors, all indicate that the IACHR will need to prioritize the following historically marginalized populations: in particular, women, children and adolescents, persons deprived of liberty, indigenous and tribal peoples, LGBTI persons, and persons in situations of human mobility:

- Women and gender-based violence: Intimate partner violence and non-partner

sexual violence ranged from 55% to 39% in five CARICOM countries. UN Women, [Ending Violence against Women and Girls Data Hub](#), 2020. The IACHR will mainstream a gender perspective in its work and will continue to address reproductive justice and the phenomenon of gender-based violence, in particular, femicide, sexual violence and the disappearance of women and girls.

- Children and adolescents: According to a February 2023 UNICEF report on [armed violence against schools](#), acts of armed violence and kidnappings against schools in Haiti increased nine-fold in one year. In addition, IACHR's Annual report records incidences of sexual and physical violence against children and adolescents in several Caribbean countries.
- Persons deprived of liberty and pre-trial detention: The IACHR will focus on addressing the situation of inhumane treatment of detainees including of asylum seekers, overcrowding and related problems caused by the excessive use of pre-trial detention. Four CARICOM countries have rates of imprisonment that exceed 400 per 100,000 inhabitants ([Prison occupancy rates in the Caribbean as of 2022, by country](#)). Over 50% of persons deprived of liberty in five CARICOM countries are being held in preventive detention (www.prisonstudies.org).
- Indigenous peoples: In several Caribbean countries, indigenous communities face challenges with achieving greater respect, and with the practical and effective exercise of the right to self-determination of their political status and of their economic, social, and cultural

2 Listed by date of creation, the thematic rapporteurships are: Indigenous Peoples (1990); Women (1994); Migrants (1996); Children (1998); Human Rights Defenders (2001); Persons Deprived of Liberty (2004); Persons of African Descent and Racial Discrimination (2005); Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Persons (2014); Memory, Truth and Justice (2019); Older Persons (2019); Persons with Disabilities (2019).

3 Special rapporteurships on Freedom of Expression (1997) and Economic, Social, Cultural and Environmental Rights (2017).

4 In particular within the IACHR's 2017-2021 strategic framework and during 2022.

development. In addition, violence and the criminalization of Indigenous leaders have continued because of their defense of the environment and protests over the illegal use of their lands.

- **LGBTI persons:** There are still laws in some Caribbean countries that criminalize consensual sexual relations between adults, which contribute to an environment that promotes discrimination and violence against LGBTI persons.
- **People in human mobility:** There is need to ensure that the humane treatment of persons in situations of human mobility is guaranteed in public policies; and that technical cooperation on human mobility is reinforced with states, regional and international bodies. In addition, it will be necessary to adopt measures aimed at preventing and combating the trafficking of persons, statelessness, and xenophobia.
- **Economic, Social, Cultural and Environmental Rights:** States must guarantee the right to a healthy environment and to climate justice. These rights were highlighted as a priority by Representatives of CARICOM States and are fully aligned with the Escazu Agreement that aims to protect the right of people to sustainable development. In this regard the Special Rapporteurship on ESCER has emphasized the need to achieve a rights-based approach to climate actions in the region that places emphasis on the right to participate in public affairs, to seek and receive and share information, and to have effective remedies.
- **Freedom of Expression:** A need to place special emphasis on ensuring a safe and propitious environment for the exercise of freedom of expression, and with respect to the challenges that media workers face in the digital sphere. This issue

is viewed as essential by the Special Rapporteurship on Freedom of Expression given the fundamental role that this right in particular, plays in consolidating and developing the democratic system, and in protecting, guaranteeing, and promoting other human rights.

Prioritize the need for States to strengthen protection for individuals against the risk of serious, imminent and irreparable harm to human rights

The IACHR faces challenges in its work in the Caribbean since states in this sub-region are not as well-known as those in North or Latin America and were only recently prioritized⁵ to deepen the Commission's understanding of human rights issues in the sub-region. In addition, countries in the Caribbean are heterogeneous in nature and therefore operate at varying levels of economic resources, institutional structure, conditions, and political will. As a result, the IACHR will need to focus on increasing access to inter-American justice for excluded groups through IACHR's Precautionary Measures and other mechanisms to strengthen protection for individuals by states against the risk of serious, imminent, and irreparable harm to human rights. These mechanisms were rarely used by victims of human rights violations in the Caribbean since the UN human rights system and its mechanisms were better known.

Promote compliance with the recommendations and standards of the inter-American human rights system

Increasing access to and implementing decisions and recommendations made in the IAHRs at the local level is problematic for IACHR's work in the sub-region. These challenges are particularly difficult to address since most CARICOM countries, although bound by the American Declaration, have neither ratified the American Convention on

⁵ In particular within the IACHR's 2017-2021 strategic framework and during 2022.

Human Rights nor indeed, most of the Inter-American instruments. It will therefore be necessary to provide technical cooperation and capacity building to states to promote better protection of the rights of citizens, as well as to non-state actors to encourage a more effective implementation of the human rights aspects of their mandates.

Cross-cutting themes:

A strategy with cross-cutting themes is critical for the sub-region and will emphasize:

- Strengthening democratic institutional, in particular to ensure social participation in the design and implementation of public policies and accountability by the state, transparency, and that mechanisms are in place for dialogue/consultations with civil society organizations.
 - Institutional strengthening of human rights bodies and encouraging the establishment of such institutions where they do not yet exist –ensuring that they are equipped to function autonomously and have the necessary formal mechanisms for the effective channeling to the state of social grievances and general human rights violations.
 - Access to Justice, whereby the Commission will give priority to structural factors that
- result in discrimination and violence against persons in situations of exclusion, to ensure access to justice without discrimination and on equal conditions. There is a need for adequate responses to serious human rights violations exacerbated by the climate of insecurity and violence by criminal actors such as gangs, drug-traffickers, arms and human traffickers. The IACHR will focus on violence prevention, the protection of victims and on citizen security in the context of the duty of states to guarantee human rights. In this regard, the Commission will continue to monitor and hold states accountable for the targeting of impoverished and indigenous communities by law enforcement officers. These officers often fail to follow due process in performing their duties. It should be noted that in 2022, a CARICOM country recorded the highest homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants for Latin America and the Caribbean, while another recorded a rate that was higher than that of Honduras (Statista, [Homicide rates in selected Latin American and Caribbean countries in 2022](#)).
- Promoting and diffusing the Inter-American human rights system, mechanisms, and standards through visits to the region, information-sharing and online programs.

Pillar two

Pillar Two/Intermediate Outcome (IO): Greater observance of and guarantees of human rights by states in the Hemisphere

Strategic objectives

Increase the capacity of the IACHR to prevent violations and address human rights crises in a timely manner, particularly those affecting historically excluded persons.

Deepen the awareness of state agents of structural problems that give rise to human rights violations in the hemisphere.

Strengthen the capacity of state agents and civil society organizations to protect, respect and ensure human rights for all.

Programs

Increase collaboration with states and non-state actors, engage in more effective monitoring, apply all IACHR mechanisms, share information and improve the communications system.

Provide technical cooperation on institutional matters and public policies with a focus on human rights and increase the capacity of states to promote and respect human rights

Increase engagement opportunities (bilateral meetings, MOUs, technical assistance with follow up of IACHR recommendations, public policies, and capacity building).

Provide technical assistance and capacity building to all actors, deepen links with National Human Rights Institutes, CSOs and the media. Adopt a differentiated approach to work with Haiti. Provide capacity building on IACHR recommendations, petitions and cases, and collective rights.

Encourage the use of Special and thematic Rapporteurships.

Promote the ratification of IA human rights instruments. Promote participation in the Caribbean Dialogue Network.

At the external level, the sub-region is also facing structural problems that result in human rights violations due to failed justice systems, impunity, discrimination and violence against historically excluded groups, and the disproportionate use of force by the police. **To address these structural problems, greater observance of and guarantees by states of human rights in the sub-region highlighted in pillar two of IACHR's Strategic Plan**, is necessary. The IACHR will constantly monitor the situation, to respond to individual or structural situations, generate standards, and provide technical cooperation and assistance with capacity building to state and non-state actors. The strategic objectives under pillar two are: to increase the capacity of the IACHR to have an impact in preventing violations and addressing human rights crises in a timely manner, in particular those adversely affecting historically excluded persons; to deepen the awareness of state agents of structural problems that give rise to human rights violations in the Hemisphere; and to strengthen the capacity of state agents and civil society organizations to promote, respect, and ensure human rights.

Increase the capacity of the IACHR to prevent violations and address human rights crises in a timely manner, particularly those affecting historically excluded persons

Units of the ES will focus on: (i) increased collaboration with state and non-state actors; (ii) a timely response to cases of human rights violations; (iii) the application of all mechanisms to facilitate a clearer understanding of the Inter-American Human Rights System, improved monitoring, and information-sharing among Units at the ES; and (iv) an improved communications system. This approach is expected to provide a platform for victims of human rights' violations to obtain access to justice when it is not available at the local level or has been exhausted through the entire judicial process, and it will promote change by influencing local policy.

Deepen the awareness of state agents of structural problems that give rise to human rights violations in the Hemisphere

The 2023-2027 IACHR strategy will emphasize the importance of the effective implementation of Inter-American standards and recommendations, stress the relevance of reinforcing the mechanisms of protection, and the promotion of human rights in Caribbean countries with the collaboration with states. Further, an advocacy strategy will be defined in accordance with the Commission's mandate to advance technical cooperation in the areas of development and human rights in the Caribbean, as well as to conduct special projects with public institutions on human rights, security, and violence. Programs will be directed at: providing technical cooperation on institutional matters and public policies with a focus on human rights; deepening awareness of state agents regarding structural problems that give rise to violations; and increasing the capacity of states to promote and respect human rights..

With states, the IACHR will:

- Establish Cooperation Agreements in furtherance of the Work Plan for the sub-region. Technical cooperation will focus on advisory services for strengthening the state institutional framework in this area, drawing up and evaluating human rights plans, and bolstering the points-of-contact mechanisms with the national systems of justice, and prosecutorial authorities.
- Optimize engagement opportunities to ensure compliance by states and access to justice for all in the sub-regional agenda through technical cooperation, capacity building and effective monitoring. This will be done through: bilateral meetings, dialogues, round tables, memoranda of agreement, assistance with drafting of plans and policies by providing input on relevant Inter-American human rights norms and standards, capacity building – seminars, training, virtual classrooms, and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs).

- Share Information on relevant work programs or petitions, cases, and precautionary measures with each new administration to prevent loss of historical memory and to facilitate a more informed transition. This approach is especially needed with Haiti.
- Provide technical assistance to strengthen institutional capacities for the promotion and diffusion of the Inter-American Human Rights System, mechanisms, and standards.
- Provide technical assistance with reviewing public policies to ensure that they are in keeping with Inter-American human rights standards.
- Encourage states to second staff to the Secretariat of the IACHR in Washington DC.
- Develop and implement a strategic plan of visits to countries of the sub-region that will include visits to all CARICOM countries over the next five years. It is important to highlight that IACHR mechanisms during visits must comply with the specific nature of each visit.
- Request a meeting with the state agency responsible for follow-up with IACHR's recommendations during visits to countries in the sub-region as was done with the visit to Suriname.

Strengthen the capacity of state agents and civil society organizations to protect, respect and ensure human rights

Programs will be directed at providing technical cooperation to all actors: to increase their capacity to promote and respect human rights; deepen links with national human rights institutes and civil society organizations; engage the media and promote and disseminate mechanisms and standards to ensure greater observance and guarantees

of human rights by states, as well as greater enjoyment of human rights by all. With respect to the latter, the IACHR will initially focus on the ratification of the American Convention on Human Rights and other key instruments such as the Conventions on the Rights of Older Persons, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the Convention Against Racism, Racial Discrimination and Related Forms of Intolerance.

With state and non-state actors⁶, the IACHR will:

- Establish Cooperation Agreements with non-state actors in furtherance of the Work Plan for the sub-region with human rights ombudsperson offices, as well as with national human rights institutions and autonomous institutions, civil society, and academia.
- Adopt a differentiated approach to Haiti. While the OAS Group continues to work with state agents in Haiti, the IACHR will work towards Implementing a cooperation mechanism through a Technical Support Group (TSG) to monitor and support the development of local capabilities to better respond to emergencies and crises related to the human rights situation in Haiti. The TSG will work towards increasing international awareness of the human rights situation in Haiti, strengthen the IACHR's capacity to provide monitoring and follow-up, and will assist with the strengthening of human rights instruments and institutions in Haiti that are willing to collaborate. The Commission will also aim to become the mechanism to facilitate civil society's ongoing processes that will stabilize the country.
- Build capacity on how to follow-up on recommendations and promote information sharing with country and thematic Rapporteurships, through close collaboration with SIMORE.

⁶ This includes civil society organizations, international and regional organizations, Ombudspersons and academia among others.

- Facilitate capacity building on Petitions and Cases, Precautionary Measures, collective rights of Indigenous peoples and for law enforcement officers on Inter-American standards on the use of force in collaboration with the Promotion and Training Unit and Rapporteurships.
 - Promote and encourage increased usage of the Special Rapporteurships on Economic, Social, Cultural and Environmental Rights (ESCER) and on Freedom of Expression, as well as a closer collaboration with the Thematic Rapporteurships at the ES. The Special Rapporteurship on ESCER is especially critical in the context of the impact of climate change on human rights, and as such it needs to establish a visible presence in the region.
 - Promote and encourage the ratification of Inter-American human rights instruments with the objective of increasing access to the protective mechanisms of the IAHRs. The IACHR will provide technical assistance to non-state actors to lobby effectively for the ratification of the American Convention on Human Rights, and other instruments listed above.
- With non-state actors, in particular, the IACHR will:
- Utilize mechanisms to hold states accountable such as: the petition and case system and precautionary measures, Article 41/18 letters, press releases, various reports, and in particular, the Annual Report to strengthen protection for all. In this regard, emphasis will be placed on prioritizing access to the Inter-American justice system for people who have been historically excluded. In addition, more emphasis will be given to technical cooperation and promotional visits, as well as hearings (the IACHR will aim to have a minimum of one public hearing from the Caribbean during each period of sessions, or to hold an ex officio hearing when no requests are submitted).
 - Continue to strengthen and build on the collaboration established between the IACHR, and the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) and the Caribbean Ombudsman Association (CAROA).
 - Promote and encourage participation in the Caribbean Dialogue Network, to use the Microsite that was prepared especially for the English-speaking Caribbean States, and to pursue the Massive Open Online Courses in English.

Pillar Three

Pillar three/Intermediate Outcome (IO):

An improved institutional culture in the IACHR with a human rights-based approach

Strategic objectives

Increase access to IACHR mechanisms for historically excluded persons, civil society organizations, and states.

Enhance the mechanisms of the IACHR with an inter-sectional and results-based management perspective.

Improve management of the human, financial, administrative, and technological resources, with a human rights-based perspective

Programs

Engage with all actors (including with OAS country offices), use all mechanisms of the IACHR to ensure access to justice for historically excluded persons. Promote the ratification of IA instruments.

Streamline and expand collaboration within the ES.

Coordinate funding and hold specific consultations on funding for Caribbean activities.

Establish an improved communications engagement with the sub-region.

At the internal level, pillar three of the Strategic Plan, focuses on an improved institutional culture in the IACHR with an appreciation of the Caribbean and with a human rights-based perspective. In keeping with this approach, all Units at the ES will work in close collaboration, applying a coordinated, gender inter-sectional and transversal approach. The strategic objectives under pillar three are: to increase access to IACHR mechanisms for historically excluded persons, civil society organizations, and states; to enhance the mechanisms of the IACHR with an inter-sectional and

results-based management perspective; to improve management of human, financial, administrative, and technological resources, with a human rights-based perspective.

Increase access to IACHR mechanisms for historically excluded persons, civil society organizations, and states

- Units at the ES will collaborate with all actors – individuals and groups, to ensure that all interest groups and parties are served. This includes states, civil society groups, churches, the media, groups

that suffer discrimination and have been historically excluded, the Office of the Assistant Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS) that has responsibility for Coordinating the Offices of the General Secretariat in Member States, as well as with individual OAS offices in the countries of Member States. A more inclusive approach is expected to increase participation in the Inter-American Human Rights System.

- Units will prioritize the ratification of Inter-American human rights instruments during Technical Cooperation and Promotional visits to the region; at bilateral and regional dialogues/meetings with states, including the Annual CARICOM Seminar; at dialogues and meetings convened by the Technical Cooperation and Public Policies Unit for states and non-state actors; and at the meetings of the Caribbean Dialogue Network.

Enhance the mechanisms of the IACHR with an inter-sectional and results-based management perspective

- A streamlined and expanded collaboration. The ES will facilitate a pooling of resources to address needs and challenges more efficiently and effectively, and to avoid duplication of work. In this regard, a Focal Point was assigned from each Unit at the ES to allow for a more efficient and integrated approach to information flow.

Improve management of the human, financial, administrative, and technological resources, with a human rights-based perspective

- Coordination of funding -- Improved coordination with donors on funding for the Caribbean.
- An improved communications engagement with the sub-region. Application of a region-specific approach by the Press and Communications Unit --utilizing modalities that are workable in the Caribbean region.



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