

# Michael Reed-Hurtado

March 22, 2016

Inter-American Commission on Human Rights  
1889 F St. N.W.  
Washington, DC, EE.UU. 20006

*Re: Application for the position of the Executive Secretary of the IACHR*

Dear Commissioners:

I thank you in advance for considering my application for the position of the Executive Secretary of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR or Commission). I believe my professional experience coupled with my academic accomplishments satisfy all qualifications and aptitudes required to support the Commission in the fulfillment of its mandate, and tackle all administrative and substantive challenges that it might face. It would be a privilege to collaborate with you and the staff members of the Secretariat to boost the impact of the IACHR, and respond to the human rights issues that exist in the Americas and the Caribbean.

I offer over 20 years of experience as an academic and a practitioner in the human rights and humanitarian field in the Americas. I am trained as a lawyer (J.D., University of Minnesota) and, additionally, hold degrees in Latin American Studies (B.A., University of Texas); and journalism (B.J., University of Texas). As a complement, I have formally engaged in studies in the social sciences (*Universidad Nacional de Colombia* and Yale University), with emphasis on mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative) research initiatives that contribute to deepening our understanding of the dynamics of violence.

In addition to my interdisciplinary training and practice, the Commission can rely on my specialized knowledge of international human rights law, acquired principally in the Latin-American context, and my expertise in comparative law, spanning theoretical and practical know-how of common law and civil law systems. Throughout the last two decades, I have actively and critically followed the evolution of international human rights law, according to decisions emitted by universal and regional human rights' protection bodies; state practice (in the Americas and beyond); and specialized literature on procedural and substantive aspects that have impacted the Inter-American regime.

As a practitioner, I have gained concrete understanding of the complexities involved in the protection of human rights in the region, with focus on certain rights (including those related to the administration of justice, the satisfaction of victims' rights, some economic and social rights, and the rights to life and personal integrity). My practical knowledge spans over dynamics that involve: individual and collective dimensions of the exercise of rights (including circumstances related to labor unions and indigenous peoples); the protection of rights of specific groups of persons (including women, LGBTI, internally displaced persons, and prisoners); and dilemmas arising in extraordinary situations (such as, armed conflict, states of exception and political transitions).

My knowledge base in the human rights field is due, in part, to the stimulus derived from having worked in Colombia, in several countries that experienced political transitions (such as Peru and Argentina), and in

countries that experienced high levels of violence coupled with low levels of institutional stability. My efforts in these contexts have demanded consideration of traditional human rights situations and cases, such as those linked to the use of force or repressive dynamics by state actors. Similarly, I have repeatedly been required to consider less traditional cases arising out of extreme violence exercised by non-state and private actors, and cases deriving from phenomena with extended manifestations in the region, such as organized crime, corruption, thriving illegal economic bonanzas, or private sector influence in public affairs and in the realization of human rights. This accumulated experience provides fertile ground for the framing of the responses that the IACHR must offer in the region, promoting human rights in law and in practice, whilst responding to very different national realities.

One of my weaknesses derives from the lack of professional experience in the Caribbean region. This void, shared by many colleagues that work in the ambit of the Inter-American regime, will need to be addressed immediately. If selected as Executive Secretary, the Commission has my unequivocal commitment that I will gain expanded knowledge of the human rights situation in all Caribbean countries and that I will work to strengthen the IACHR's involvement in this region, according to the priorities you adopt.

Throughout my career, I have combined the perspective of a practitioner with academic deliberation, developing linkages between theoretical knowledge and human rights practice. Integration of these approaches has proven beneficial in past efforts aimed at creatively executing the institutional mandates of United Nations (UN) specialized agencies. Empirically grounded research is very useful in responding to human rights problems that are resistant to change. In this light, I can underscore my contribution to the tailoring of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) response to internal displacement in Colombia; or to the assessment of the risks and challenges of the protection of returning refugees and internally displaced persons in Afghanistan, in the context of that country's UN peacekeeping mission (UNAMA). Similarly, integration of academic expertise with practical experience proved successful in mapping complex relations in the dynamics of perpetration of gross violations in Colombia, as part of the monitoring mandate of the Office in Colombia of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR-Colombia). In the context of this effort, a groundbreaking information and analytical system that uses information technology and statistical know-how to enhance the organization's capacity to monitor human rights and to promote accountability was put in place. Innovations, such as these, can assist the IACHR to fully comply with its mandate, according to institutional priorities.

Over the years, I have been part of multiple human rights training and dissemination initiatives (general and specific in scope), aimed at the general public as well as specific audiences, including public officials of all branches of power. I am an accomplished university professor, both in Latin America and the United States of America. I have been invited as a lecturer to most of the countries in the region to deliver speeches and presentations on legal issues as well as subjects pertaining to politics and social sciences. My written and oral communication skills, in both Spanish and English, are evident through the ample collection of specialized and general interest publications, and the wide-ranging topics addressed in successful academic presentations.

Likewise, I have demonstrated my capacity to produce concise and timely reports, with accuracy and precision, on complex and sensitive issues, including: UN reports on the human rights situation in specific countries; analytical working papers on the application of refugee law in Latin America, on behalf of UNHCR; or public and confidential reports on prison conditions throughout the region. My writing ability allows me to properly represent institutional views on delicate and divisive matters, in a constructive way that achieves a technical dialogue with all stakeholders.

My professional qualifications are complemented by my ability to foster institutional relations, as demonstrated by past coordination, lobby and external relations efforts conducted in representation of the UN and multiple non-governmental organizations. In the context of previous team efforts, colleagues and supervisors have highlighted my capacity to develop solid trust-based relationships with multiple and varied

stakeholders – including government representatives, diplomats and grass-roots leaders, alike – as an outstanding personal and professional asset.

Based on previous planning, management and leadership undertakings, I am qualified to effectively and dynamically assume all administrative responsibilities that are assigned to the Executive Secretary. My past experience as a coordinator, director and team-manager provides the needed bases to design and adopt the organizational and administrative framework required to meet all institutional goals, according to the strategic vision embraced by the Commission. I believe effective interaction amongst various internal processes – including planning, personnel and team management, operational monitoring, implementation adjustment (or correction), and evaluation – needs to be achieved in any organizational setting. An appropriate planning framework and results-based management scheme can simplify all internal reporting and supervision structures and systems, and ensure transparency and accountability of all persons engaged in the operation of the organization. Coupled with my past experience in planning and management (in governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental settings), I have been responsible for successful fundraising exercises in relation to varied donors, including bilateral and multilateral aid agencies, private foundations and individual philanthropists (or private givers). Past managerial responsibilities have demanded that I oversee complex fiscal and accounting overhauls, and apply measures to drastically reduce spending, when needed. After years of experience, I am convinced that administrative practice needs to be integrated with the structural purpose of any organization, including the IACHR. I am fully qualified and willing to assume all program and budget-related challenges, in close cooperation with all relevant staff members of the Commission.

In closing, I want to underscore my preparedness and willingness to work as part of a team and integrate all efforts that will facilitate planned change, leading to greater effectiveness of the Commission's human rights protection mandate. Ever since I served as a fellow at the Commission, in the mid-1990s, I have followed its evolution. With interest, I have provided support in the conduction of some of its advocacy and litigation activities, serving (on various occasions) as a guest lecturer or as an expert witness. As an interested outsider, I have observed the various restructuring processes that have been announced or implemented, aimed at tackling demanding issues, such as, addressing case backlogs, providing appropriate support to all working groups and rapporteurships, and reducing the response timeframe to individual petitions. The upcoming administrative cycle will demand the application of leadership and managerial skills to address some lagging issues and, in turn, tackle all rising operational challenges.

For all of the previously stated reasons, it would be a privilege and my honor to serve the Commission in the fulfillment of its mandate, and, in this way, contribute to the protection of human rights in the Americas and the Caribbean.

I thank you in advance for your consideration, and hope that you find that my application satisfies your institutional requirements and interests. In addition to the elements briefly highlighted in this letter, you will find details of my academic and professional accomplishments in the enclosed *curriculum vitae*. I am, of course, available to provide additional information and sustain a dialogue regarding the projection and practical conduction of the position of the Executive Secretary of the IACHR.

Yours sincerely,

(Signature on original)

Michael Reed Hurtado