IACHR Inter-American Commission on Human Rights

RESOLUTION TO LIFT PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES 16/2024

Precautionary Measure No. 281-10
Oscar Siri Zúñiga and family regarding Honduras
March 31, 2024
Original: Spanish

I. SUMMARY

1. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) decides to lift the present precautionary measures in favor of Oscar Siri Zúñiga and his family in Honduras. At the time of making the decision, the Commission assessed the measures adopted internally by the State, as well as the lack of information on risk events against the beneficiaries since 2017. In that regard, taking into account the nature of the precautionary measures and in light of the information available, the Commission considered that it is not possible to identify a situation of risk under the terms of Article 25 of the Rules of Procedure at this time. Upon not identifying compliance with the procedural requirements, the IACHR has decided to lift these precautionary measures.

II. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. On June 10, 2011, the IACHR granted precautionary measures in favor of Oscar Siri Zúñiga and his family in Honduras.1 According to the request for precautionary measures, armed persons have been guarding Siri Zúñiga’s residence since February 2011. In particular, it was reported that on May 19 there was a shooting at his property when three armed individuals attempted to enter the residence. It was noted that the competent authorities did not respond in a timely manner to the alleged situation that places the proposed beneficiaries at risk and that the security detail was reduced to a single person. In accordance with Article 25 of the Rules of Procedure, the Commission requested the State of Honduras to: a) adopt the necessary measures to guarantee the life and integrity of Oscar Siri Zúñiga and his family unit; b) consult and agree upon the measures to be adopted with the beneficiaries and their representatives; and c) report on the actions taken to investigate the facts that gave rise to the adoption of this precautionary measure.

III. INFORMATION PROVIDED DURING THE TIME THESE PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES WERE IN FORCE

3. During the time the precautionary measures were in force, the Commission has followed up on the subject matter of these precautionary measures by requesting information from the parties.2

4. The State submitted their observations on the following dates:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Dates</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>June 20, December 16</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>February 8, April 13, April 27, May 18, June 13, October 22</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>February 19, April 2, June 14, October 23, November 5</td>
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1 Summary of the matters in which precautionary measures were granted in 2011. Available at: https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/decisions/mc/precautionary.asp?Year=2023&searchText=281-10

2 On December 11, 2012, the Commission decided not to extend precautionary measures in favor of Mr. José Adán Gonzales Espinosa. By communication of January 16, 2013, the Commission informed its decision not to extend the precautionary measures. In 2013, the representation also requested the extension of precautionary measures in favor of Cecilia Perdomo. No decision was issued to extend precautionary measures in her favor.
5. The representation submitted observations on the following dates:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Dates</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>January 6, April 8, May 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>May 27</td>
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<td>2018</td>
<td>August 28</td>
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<td>2019</td>
<td>December 2</td>
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<td>2020</td>
<td>September 28</td>
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<td>2022</td>
<td>January 10, March 14</td>
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<tr>
<td>2023</td>
<td>October 20</td>
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6. The Commission sent requests for information to the parties on July 8, 2011; November 18, 2011; March 16, 2012; May 4, 2012; May 30, 2012; July 17, 2012; September 17, 2012; November 2, 2012. The Commission continued to follow up on the matter through requests for information from the parties on March 18, 2013; May 23, 2013; July 29, 2013; December 6, 2013; March 6, 2014; December 16, 2014; February 24, 2015; September 10, 2015; May 12, 2016; July 27, 2018; May 10, 2019; January 23, 2020; December 27, 2021; May 26, 2022, and September 8, 2022. On August 22, 2023, the Commission reiterated its request for information to the representation in order to evaluate keeping these precautionary measures in force. The Commission has not yet received a response from the representation.

7. Initially, the representation was exercised by Mr. Gustavo Bueso Jacquier. Since May 19, 2012, the representation has been exercised by the beneficiary, Mr. Oscar Siri Zúñiga.

A. Information provided by the State

8. In 2011, the State stated that Mr. Oscar Siri Zúñiga was permanently assigned two police escorts. At the request of the representation, police escorts were changed and three bulletproof vests were assigned to the security personnel. The State reported that there is an investigation file for the crimes of coercion and threats against Mr. Siri Zúñiga. In 2012, it reiterated the alleged security plan adopted in favor of Mr. Siri Zúñiga, which reportedly consists of an official of the COBRA squad (special operations command) and another from the National Directorate of the Preventive Police (Dirección Nacional de la Policía Preventiva). It was added that investigative actions were allegedly carried out such as witness statements, interrogations of the alleged perpetrators.

9. On October 23, 2013, the State stated that Mr. Oscar Siri Zúñiga was assigned bulletproof vests. In view of the beneficiary’s complaint that his security escort was allegedly deprived of his equipment and
salary, on January 14, 2013, the Deputy Commissioner of Police ordered the reassignment of an escort. By communication of November 5, 2013, the State updated on various investigative proceedings for the crime of violation of the duties of officials against judges N.B. and I.R., for failing to execute the judgment of October 18, 1994. On April 8, 2015, the State continued to report on the investigative proceedings. On May 6, 2015, the State indicated that a consultation meeting was held with the beneficiary and the staff of the Ministry of Security on April 24, 2015. The beneficiary reported that in 2014, he was allegedly assigned a second escort, therefore having two escorts at his disposal. At the meeting, several agreements were reached.3

10. On May 27, 2016, the State recalled that the protection measures in favor of the beneficiary are police patrols at his residence and a protection plan. A consultation meeting was held on February 9, 2016. On August 28, 2018, the State indicated that the beneficiary has two police escorts assigned since June 2016. In addition, in June 2017, investigations were allegedly initiated into the murder of Mr. Cristino Betanco, one of Mr. Siri Zúñiga’s employees. The State stressed that it had showed its willingness to comply with the precautionary measures. On December 2, 2019, the State indicated that a consultation meeting was held with the beneficiary on November 21, 2019. During these meetings, the beneficiaries stated that both the patrols and the protection plans are being implemented. Additional agreements were reached.5

11. On September 28, 2020, the State submitted information on the virtual follow-up meeting held with the beneficiary on September 23, 2020. At the meeting, the beneficiary stated that he was satisfied with his police liaisons6 and agreements were reached. He further indicated that he was being "persecuted" by the Police Directorate of Investigations (Dirección Policíal de Investigaciones, DPI), following a summons.

12. On January 10, 2022, the State reported that on December 14, 2021, a follow-up meeting was held to implement precautionary measures and agreements were adopted.7 The beneficiary stated that the escorts were reportedly fulfilling their functions and that the patrols are allegedly being carried out three times a week. On March 14, 2022, the State stated that Mr. Oscar Siri Zúñiga has protection measures consisting of escorts, patrols, and police liaison. On January 14, 2022, the National Director of Protection and Special Services of the National Police (Protección y Servicios Especiales de la Policía Nacional) confirmed that the beneficiary’s protection plan consists of two escorts who carry their complete equipment, such as a rifle and a pistol. It was also noted that on November 6, 2020, a risk assessment was carried out on Mr. Oscar Siri Zúñiga which yielded a risk level of 17%, which is an ordinary risk level,8 classified as a risk arising spontaneously from both internal

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3 The indicated agreements were the following: a. to request a report on the progress of the investigations of the facts subject to these precautionary measures from the Public Prosecutor’s Office and the National Directorate of Criminal Investigation; b. to request before the competent authorities the replacement of one of the escorts assigned to Mr. Siri Zúñiga due to his medical disability; c. to request the police authorities to coordinate the escorts’ days off in order to always maintain a security detail of two police elements; d. to provide the beneficiary with the telephone number of the Commissioner responsible for ensuring compliance with his security. As well as telephone numbers of the links in case of emergency; and e. to hold monitoring meetings every three months. The next meeting was to be held in July 2015 or when the beneficiary deems it necessary.

4 It was reported that the following agreements were reached: i) to request progress in the investigations of the complaints filed by Mr. Siri Zúñiga; and ii) to continue with the patrols at the beneficiary’s home.

5 The reported agreements were the following: i) to maintain the security detail consisting of two police escorts; ii) to maintain police patrols three times a week at the beneficiary’s residence and workplace; iii) to implement police liaison as a protection measure; iv) send an official letter to the Police Directorate of Investigations to forward the investigative progress in the complaint filed for the crime of threats against life; and, v) that the follow-up of the precautionary measure be transferred to the General Directorate of the Protection System of the Secretariat of Human Rights.

6 It was reported that the following agreements were reached: a. to maintain the protection detail consisting of two police agents; in addition, it was agreed that once the health emergency was over, the second police element would be reinstated; b. to send an official letter to the Police Directorate of Investigations to inform the National Director of the DPI in order to report on the events of September 20; c. to maintain police patrols three times a week at the beneficiary’s home and workplace; d. to maintain police liaison as a protection measure; e. to perform a risk assessment on the beneficiary in order to implement the most suitable and appropriate protection measures; and f. to schedule the next monitoring meeting, if possible, by the end of December 2020.

7 It was reported that the following agreements were reached: a. to maintain the security detail consisting of two escorts; b. to maintain police patrols; c. to maintain police liaison; and, d. to schedule the next monitoring meeting for June 2022.

8 La Gaceta, official newspaper of the republic of Honduras. Agreement Number 2035-2018, annexes. September 26, 2018
and external factors to the human person as its derivation arises from coexistence in society. It therefore does not require the special intervention of the State.⁹

13. Lastly, on October 20, 2023, the State reiterated that the beneficiaries have protection measures in their favor, which consist of liaison and police patrols to Mr. Siri Zúñiga’s residence and workplace. A risk assessment of the beneficiary was carried out, which resulted in a minimum risk with a percentage of 06%, a hypothetical category in which the individual is only threatened by death and natural disease, and does not require the special intervention of the State since protection is the individual’s own responsibility. According to the proceedings and investigations carried out, no relevant facts that could show a risk to the life and physical integrity of Mr. Oscar Siri Zúñiga were found.

B. Information provided by the representation

14. In 2011, the representation requested two new agents of the COBRA squad for Mr. Siri Zúñiga’s protection plan, as well as bulletproof vests for the protection of the beneficiaries and the members of his protection plan. It was reported that the allegations had not been investigated. In July, the representation warned that Mr. Siri Zúñiga was receiving death threats, had experienced hacker attacks against both himself and his lawyer, his residence was monitored, and a prize of $500,000 US dollars was offered for his murder.

15. On March 15, 2012, the driver, administrator, personal assistant, and one of the police officers assigned to the beneficiary were deprived of their liberty for a few hours, tortured, and beaten. The events were allegedly perpetrated by six members of the motorized police whose commander is Commissioner Constantino Zavala, who reportedly stated that they were going to kill Mr. Siri Zúñiga. On August 20, 2012, the Police Inspector and Head of the Financial Crimes Section of the National Directorate of Criminal Investigation (Dirección Nacional de Investigación, DNIC) allegedly ordered agents of the financial crimes section to trace all cases against Mr. Siri Zúñiga in order to reopen them and find some way to charge him with criminal responsibilities. Lastly, the representation alleged various flaws with its protection plan, such as restructuring the plan without his prior knowledge and periods during which he is reportedly left unprotected.

16. In 2013, the representation reported surveillance events to his home. On January 8, 2014, the representation stated that on February 4, 2013, he filed a complaint for violation of fair trial due process and other rights against judges N.E.B.V. and I.Y.R.M. as they allegedly did not execute the judgment of October 18, 1994. This judgment restored the possession of a property of Mr. Siri Zúñiga, occupied by the United States Military Group in Honduras. On July 15, 2014, Mr. Oscar Siri Zúñiga learned of the murder of Mr. Néstor Alexander Escalante Ordoñez that happened on July 14. Mr. Escalante Ordoñez worked as Mr. Siri Zúñiga’s bodyguard and driver. On December 28, 2014, the representation added that in Colonia Milenium Sur on December 27, three hitmen attacked Mr. Virgilio González Espinoza, a trusted employee of Mr. Siri Zúñiga, with automatic weapons. Mr. González Espinoza managed to get out alive because he had a gun, which he had authorization to carry, and because one of his friends allegedly aided him. The criminals were chased by members of the National Police who failed to detain them.

17. On October 3, 2015, the representation reported that Mr. Néstor Alexander Escalante Ordoñez received death threats on November 26, 2013. It was also reported that, on February 23, 2015, several criminals attacked the property in the Milenio Sur neighborhood that belonged to the beneficiary. The unidentified individuals reportedly began shooting the guardhouse. After the armed attack, the individuals fled the scene on cars. It was alleged that Mr. Oscar Danilo González Banegas was allegedly attempting to extort and threaten Mr. Siri Zúñiga’s children. Mr. González reportedly entered the beneficiary’s home threatening to kill

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him if he did not provide money he demanded. An attempt on Ms. Cecilia Perdomo Flores, an associate of Mr. Siri Zúñiga, was also reported.

18. On April 25, 2016, the representation reported that police officer D.F.H. had withdrawn from Mr. Oscar Siri Zúñiga’s security details, claiming that they were on vacation. The beneficiary stated that he was not informed of the days his security detail had days off, nor was a replacement offered. In addition, the beneficiary indicated that the National Police and the Public Prosecutor's Office would not investigate the facts that placed him at risk. On February 6, 2017, the representation warned that the beneficiary had been violently removed from his vehicle by personnel that were being transported in two vehicles, from which some of them got out. They reportedly pointed at the beneficiary with sawed-off shotguns and made him get into one of the vehicles. The beneficiary was reportedly transferred to a cell of the Criminal Investigation Department. An officer reportedly recognized Mr. Oscar Siri Zúñiga and, due to the pressure exerted by the media, released him. The beneficiary stated he heard his captors say that their intention was to kill him and throw him into a barracks on the “Cuesta de la Virgen”, a mountainous area where the death squads threw their victims’ bodies.

19. On August 17, 2018, the representation reiterated the lack of investigation. It was also stated that the patrols reported by the State only deliver food to the escorts assigned to the beneficiary’s safety. On May 20, 2019, the representation stated that the assigned escorts had been replaced by new agents in January 2019. On February 2, 2020, the representation reiterated previous allegations. On April 13, 2020, it was reported that the protection detail assigned to the beneficiary was to be reduced to a single police agent due to the emergency caused by COVID-19. On September 26, 2022, the beneficiary alleged he was experiencing post-traumatic stress and panic attacks. The beneficiary added that the facts subject to the precautionary measures are still under investigation and that the protection measures, that consisted of security detail, regular meetings, and patrols have continued to function normally. On February 10, 2023, the representation submitted background information on the assassination in Honduras and the shortcomings in the investigations of the facts.

IV. ANALYSIS OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF URGENCY, SERIOUSNESS, AND IRREPARABLE HARM

20. The precautionary measures mechanism is part of the Commission’s function of overseeing compliance with the human rights obligations set forth in Article 106 of the Charter of the Organization of American States. These general oversight functions are established in Article 41(b) of the American Convention on Human Rights, as well as in Article 18(b) of the IACHR Statute. The mechanism of precautionary measures is set forth in Article 25 of the Commission’s Rules of Procedure. In accordance with this Article, the IACHR grants precautionary measures in urgent and serious situations in which these measures are necessary to avoid irreparable harm to persons or to the subject matter of a petition or case before the organs of the inter-American system.

21. The Inter-American Commission and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (“the Inter-American Court” or “I/A Court H.R.”) have established repeatedly that precautionary and provisional measures have a dual nature, both protective and precautionary.10 Regarding the protective nature, these measures seek to avoid irreparable harm and preserve the exercise of human rights.11 To do this, the IACHR shall assess the

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10 See in this regard: I/A Court H.R. Matter of the Yare I and Yare II Capital Region Penitentiary Center, Provisional Measures, Order of July 6, 2009, considerandum 5; I/A Court H.R. Case of Carpio, Giolle et al. v. Guatemala, Provisional Measures, Order of July 6, 2009, considerandum 16.

problem raised, the effectiveness of state actions to address the situation described, and the vulnerability to which the persons proposed as beneficiaries would be exposed if the measures are not adopted.\(^{12}\) Regarding their precautionary nature, these measures have the purpose of preserving a legal situation while under consideration by the organs of the inter-American system. They aim to safeguard the rights at risk until the petition pending before the inter-American system is resolved. Their object and purpose are to ensure the integrity and effectiveness of an eventual decision on the merits and, thus, avoid any further infringement of the rights at issue, a situation that may adversely affect the useful effect (\textit{effet utile}) of the final decision. In this regard, precautionary or provisional measures enable the State concerned to comply with the final decision and, if necessary, to implement the ordered reparations. In the process of reaching a decision, according to Article 25(2) of its Rules of Procedure, the Commission considers that:

a. “serious situation” refers to a grave impact that an action or omission can have on a protected right or on the eventual effect of a pending decision in a case or petition before the organs of the inter-American system;
b. “urgent situation” refers to risk or threat that is imminent and can materialize, thus requiring immediate preventive or protective action; and
c. “irreparable harm” refers to injury to rights which, due to their nature, would not be susceptible to reparation, restoration or adequate compensation.

22. In this sense, Article 25(7) of the Commission’s Rules of Procedure establishes that decisions “granting, extending, modifying or lifting precautionary measures shall be adopted through reasoned resolutions.” Article 25(9) sets forth that the Commission shall evaluate periodically, at its own initiative or at the request of either party, whether to maintain, modify or lift the precautionary measures in force. In this regard, the Commission shall assess whether the serious and urgent situation and the risk of irreparable harm that caused the adoption of the precautionary measures persist. Furthermore, it shall consider whether there are new situations that may comply with the requirements outlined in Article 25 of the Rules of Procedure.

23. Similarly, the Commission recalls that while the assessment of the procedural requirements when adopting precautionary measures is carried out from a \textit{prima facie} standard of review, keeping such measures in force requires a more rigorous evaluation.\(^{13}\) In this sense, when no imminent risk is identified, the burden of proof and argument increases over time.\(^{14}\) The Inter-American Court has indicated that the passage of a reasonable time without any threats or intimidation, in addition to the lack of imminent risk, may lead to lifting international protection measures.\(^{15}\)

24. In the matter at hand, the Commission recalls that the precautionary measures were granted in 2011 in favor of Oscar Siri Zúñiga and his family unit. It was considered that the beneficiaries were at risk under the terms of Article 25 of the Commission’s Rules of Procedure after receiving the information that armed persons were monitoring the family home and the incident of a shooting during which three individuals attempted to enter the beneficiaries’ residence. In this regard, the Commission takes into special consideration the measures implemented by the State such as a security detail, bulletproof vests (see \textit{supra} para.8), police patrols to the beneficiary’s home and workplace (see \textit{supra} para. 10), and the establishment of a police liaison (see \textit{supra} para. 12). Patrols and police liaison are reportedly still in force (see \textit{supra} para. 13). The Commission

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\(^{13}\)I/A Court H.R., \textit{Provisional Measures regarding Mexico}, Order of February 7, 2017, paras. 16 and 17.

\(^{14}\)I/A Court H.R., \textit{Provisional Measures regarding Mexico}, Order of February 7, 2017, paras. 16 and 17.

\(^{15}\)I/A Court H.R., \textit{Provisional Measures regarding Mexico}, Order of February 7, 2017, paras. 16 and 17.
observes that the representation did not dispute that such actions had actually been carried out and even stated that the protection measures were functioning normally (see supra para. 19).

25. The Commission recognizes the importance of the review of risk assessment by the competent authorities, which makes it possible to know the current risk and adapt the implemented measures in accordance with its results. In this matter, two risk assessments were allegedly carried out, one in November 2020 (see supra para. 12) and another in October 2023 (see supra para. 13). Both showed a result of ordinary risk. It should be noted that the risk assessment carried out in 2023 reportedly resulted in a minimum risk with a percentage of 0.6%, a hypothetical category in which the individual is only threatened by death and natural disease and does not require State intervention.

26. In relation to the investigations of the facts reported during the time these measures were in force, the Commission verifies that the State reported the opening of various investigations. However, no details were provided on the actions carried out within the framework of these measures or substantial progress therein. In this regard, the Commission calls on the State to continue with the investigations of the facts related to these precautionary measures, in accordance with the inter-American parameters, in order to clarify these facts.

27. The information indicates that consultation meetings regarding the implementation of the precautionary measures were held on the following dates: April 24, 2015 (see supra para. 9), November 21, 2019 (see supra para. 10), September 23, 2020 (see supra para. 11), December 14, 2021 (see supra para. 12). The Commission acknowledges the State’s willingness to discuss the measures to be implemented with the beneficiaries and their representation. However, the information available reflects the representation provided a general questioning of the implementation of the precautionary measures. Upon analyzing the representation’s response, the Commission notes that, in the last seven years, no specific event has been reported that allows analyzing the continuity of situation that places the proposed beneficiaries at risk under the terms of Article 25 of its Rules of Procedure. Between 2017 to present day, the Commission warns that the State has continued to provide information on the spaces for consultation promoted and the agreements reached. To date, the Commission considers that it has no elements to question the actions implemented by the State, nor had it any additional elements that would indicate the existence of a situation that places the proposed beneficiaries at risk under Article 25 of its Rules of Procedure.

28. The Commission identifies that, in 2023, the representation was informed that it would proceed with the analysis of keeping these precautionary measures in force. However, no response was received. The Commission recalls that the representation of the beneficiaries who wish the measures to continue must present proof of reasons for doing so. In this regard, and considering the analysis carried out above, the Commission understands that the information available does not allow it to continue supporting that the requirements of Article 25 of the Rules of Procedure are met. Given the above, and taking into account the exceptional and temporary nature of precautionary measures, the Commission considers that it is appropriate to lift these measures.

29. In line with what was indicated by the Inter-American Court in various matters, a decision to lift does not imply that the State is relieved from its general obligations of protection, contained in Article 1.1 of the Convention, within the framework of which the State is especially obliged to guarantee the rights of persons at risk and must promote the necessary investigations to clarify the facts, followed by the

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16 I/A Court H.R. I/A Court H.R., Provisional Measures regarding Mexico, Order of February 7, 2017, paras. 16 and 17.
consequences that may be established. In the same way, also based on the assessment of the Inter-American Court, the lifting of the precautionary measures, or the declaration of non-compliance with them, does not imply an eventual decision on the merits of the controversy if the case were to be brought before the inter-American system through a petition, nor does it prejudge state responsibility for the events denounced.¹⁹

30. Lastly, the Commission emphasizes that regardless of the lifting of these measures, in accordance with Article 1(1) of the American Convention, it is the obligation of the State of Honduras to respect and guarantee the rights recognized therein, including the life and personal integrity of the persons identified in the matter at hand.

V. DECISION

31. The Commission decides to lift the precautionary measures granted in favor of Oscar Siri Zúñiga and his family unit in Honduras.

32. The Commission recalls that the lifting of these measures does not prevent the representation from filing a new request for precautionary measures should they consider that there is a situation that meets the requirements established in Article 25 of its Rules of Procedure.

33. The Commission instructs its Executive Secretariat to notify this resolution to the State of Honduras and to the representatives.

34. Approved on March 31, 2024, by Roberta Clarke, President; Carlos Bernal Pulido, First Vice-President; José Luis Caballero Ochoa, Second Vice-President; Arif Bulkan; Andrea Pochak; and Gloria Monique de Mees, members of the IACHR.

Tania Reneaum Panszi
Executive Secretary