

PERMANENT COUNCIL OF THE
ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES
COMMITTEE ON INTER-AMERICAN SUMMITS MANAGEMENT
AND CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION
IN OAS ACTIVITIES

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APPLICATION TO PARTICIPATE IN OAS ACTIVITIES
PURSUANT TO ARTICLE 6 OF THE GUIDELINES FOR
PARTICIPATION BY CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS
IN OAS ACTIVITIES [CP/RES. 759 (1217/99)]

[Human Rights First]

ANALYSIS OF FACTORS RELATED TO THE APPLICATION BY
HUMAN RIGHTS FIRST
TO PARTICIPATE IN OAS ACTIVITIES

This document was prepared by the Department of International Affairs / Secretariat for External Relations to provide member states of the Organization of American States (OAS) with information on the civil society organization (CSO) *Human Rights First*.

The information contained in this report is in response to resolution CP/RES. 759 (1217/99), "Guidelines for the Participation of Civil Society Organizations in OAS Activities." This document contains a summary and a list of supporting documentation presented by *Human Rights First* in accordance with the aforementioned Guidelines.

1. Background

Human Rights First (formerly known as *Lawyers Committee for Human Rights*) is non-profit, non-partisan human rights organization based in New York City and Washington, D.C. It was founded in 1978. *Human Rights First* is made up of a group of lawyers who advocate for policy change at the highest levels of national and international government. *Human Rights First* seeks protection for disenfranchised citizens through the legal system, and aims to increase international awareness and understanding of human rights issues, challenges and abuses via the media. The *Human Rights First* attempts to build coalitions among groups with divergent views, mobilizing citizens to act on behalf of human rights victims across the world.

The organization works to protect those at risk of human rights violations, namely: refugees seeking asylum, victims of crimes against humanity or other mass human rights violations, victims of discrimination, those whose rights are sidelined for the sake of national security, and human rights advocates who are targeted for defending the rights of others. *Human Rights First* actively works to prevent violations against such citizens, and also pursues legal justice and legislative accountability for violations against them.

Human Rights First is funded by a variety of organizations and individuals and it does not accept any government assistance. Audited financial statements show that they receive contributions from foundations, individuals, and law firms corporations such as Akim Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP, Allen & Overy LLP, among others. *Human Rights First* activities are carried out with the participation and support of a number of individual and organizational advocates and attorneys from across the world.

Human Rights First submitted its application to the OAS on August 6, 2008.

2. Name, address, and date of establishment

Name: *Human Rights First*

Address: 333 Seventh Avenue
13th Floor
New York, NY 10001
U.S.A

Telephone: (212) 845-5200
Fax: (212) 845-5299

E-mail address: feedback@humanrightsfirst.org

Website: <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org>

President: Michael Posner

Contact person: Elisa Massimino

Date of charter: 1978

3. Primary areas of activity of the CSO and their relationship to OAS activities

Human Rights First works to build respect for human rights and the rule of law throughout the world. *Human Rights First* conducts work in five programmatic areas, which focus on:

- Support and protecting defenders of human rights either at risk of detention or under criminal proceedings by seeking their release from detention, the dropping of charges, the abatement of threats and harassment and accountability for violence against defenders.
- Promote the creation and implementation of law and policies that better protect and facilitate the work of human rights defenders. In OAS Member States, *Human Rights First's* defense work is centered on Colombia and Guatemala;
- Prevent and seeking accountability for mass atrocities around the world, and advocate for the world-wide eradication of torture;
- Fight discrimination through the promotion of hate crime legislation and monitoring and reporting of crimes in which bias is clearly an element;
- Ensure that counter-terrorism policies or other policies in the name of national security do not erode fundamental human rights; and,
- Assist asylum seekers obtain refugee status in the United States.

4. CSO contributions that could be of interest to the OAS

Human Rights First can contribute to OAS work in areas such as strengthening the defense of human rights in the Americas through the following activities:

- Working with other nongovernmental, intergovernmental, regional and international organizations to promote the awareness and advocacy of human rights defenders in the Americas;
- Strengthening protective mechanisms for human rights in the region through advocacy at the municipal and national levels for effective legislation to protect at-risk citizens and human rights defenders;
- Conducting original research and reports on violations against human rights defenders to be presented at meetings of the OAS Permanent Council and other appropriate forums;
- Promotion of human rights issues in the hemisphere through advocacy campaigns, media work and, by maintaining contacts with local human rights defenders and organizations in the Americas.

5. Identification of the OAS work areas in which the CSO proposes to support ongoing activities or to make recommendations on the best way to achieve OAS objectives

Human Rights First offers to cooperate with the OAS to improve the inter-American system of human rights. *Human Rights First* can provide support in the following work areas:

- Provide information on specific cases of concern regarding human rights defenders to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), particularly its Unit on Human Rights Defenders, and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights;
- Provide advice to the Committee on Juridical and Political Affairs (CAJP) in its review of the inter-American human rights system and aid in the promotion of OAS strategies for the protection of human rights defenders;
- Attend the OAS General Assembly and other relevant OAS meetings to provide an insight into the situation of human rights defenders in the hemisphere; and
- Present *amicus curiae* briefs to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

6. Documents submitted by the CSO to the OAS

- Letter addressed to the Secretary General of the OAS, dated August 6, 2008
- Charter
- Mission Statement
- Financial Statements for 2006-2007 (audited by BDO Seidman, LLP).
- 2007 Annual Report