

May 6, 2008

H.E. Alan Garcia Perez
President
Republic of Peru

Your Excellency:

We write to express our deep concern about the threatening remarks made by representatives of your government against the Association of Human Rights (APRODEH), a Peruvian non-governmental organization with a proven record of commitment to democracy and the rule of law in your country. These statements stand in stark contrast to the progress made by Peru since 2001 in acknowledging past crimes and improving respect for human rights.

Vice President Luis Giampietri has declared that Mr. Francisco Soberon, founder of APRODEH is a "notorious rabble rouser who will be held accountable one day by the Peruvian State". Second Vice President Lourdes Mendoza has called for the closure of APRODEH. In your own declarations to the press you have referred to APRODEH's work as "treason to the fatherland". Such attacks create a dangerous environment for human rights defenders, some of whom are already conducting their work under death threats due to their role in the trial of former President Alberto Fujimori.

Since founding APRODEH, Mr. Soberon has played a central role in investigating and documenting human rights violations during the 1980-2000 conflict. Most recently he has been a driving force behind the prosecution of former President Fujimori. Importantly, APRODEH and Mr. Soberon have consistently condemned terrorist actions and use of violence by any group. He and the members of APRODEH enjoy the respect of international organizations around the world for their over two decades of public service. Mr. Soberon has received numerous awards recognizing the importance of his human rights work, including the National Order of Merit Award from the French Government

Attacks against Mr. Soberon and APRODEH are—regrettably—only part of a wider pattern of hostility against human rights defenders in Peru. Professionals with an impeccable record of peaceful human rights advocacy are being targeted by specious prosecutions spurred by their work in exposing corruption and human rights violations committed during the regime led by Mr. Fujimori. The use of criminal investigations and false public rhetoric as instruments to silence or fight peaceful dissent is a dangerous trend that undermines human rights and democracy in the country.

We are confident that your government will do its utmost to prevent any acts of violence or harassment against Mr. Soberon, APRODEH and human rights defenders at large. We urge you to publicly repudiate the comments made by your government impugning

APRODEH and other human rights defenders and ensure that no further inflammatory comments are made. We also urge you to make a public statement in support of the invaluable work of human rights defenders such as Mr. Soberon. We, as well as the broader international community, will be attentive to the evolution of this worrying situation and remain committed to ensuring the safety of human rights defenders in Peru.

Sincerely,

Juan Mendez
President
International Center for Transitional Justice

Matt Easton
Director, Human Rights Defenders Program
Human Rights First

Mary Lawlor
Director
Front Line

Souhayr Belhassen, FIDH President; Eric Sottas, OMCT Secretary General,
Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, A joint programme of FIDH
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Joy Olson
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