

Statement of the Steering Committee of the Friends of the Inter-American Democratic Charter

We write to join our voices to the increasing number of states, international organizations and prominent individuals expressing concern and repugnance about a recent bill passed by the Surinamese legislature to grant amnesty for crimes, including murder, which took place prior to 1992. Clearly instigated by the incumbent president, Desi Bouterse, the purpose of this bill is to provide President Bouterse and his co-defendants with impunity from the allegations and evidence presented to the Surinamese courts that they are responsible for the extra-judicial execution of 15 political opponents in December of 1982. The bill is intended to abort the trial which has been moving slowly and unsteadily forward for many years. President Bouterse has already been convicted by a court in the Netherlands for drug trafficking.

The Surinamese Court is scheduled to render judgment on the validity of the legislation on May 11. Human Rights organizations and others have stated emphatically that Amnesty cannot be applied to those responsible for gross Human Rights violations, including Heads of State and other government officers engaged in extra-judicial executions. We also remind that well established jurisprudence ruled by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights declares that amnesty laws that impede the investigation and punishment of crimes against humanity are incompatible with the American Convention on Human Rights and thus lack any legal effect.

Javier Zuniga, Special Advisor to Amnesty International, described the situation compellingly in a recent statement in which he said in part: "Confident that the judiciary of Suriname, faced with this historical opportunity of preserving the rule of law in Suriname, will act independently and impartially and will ignore the amnesty law." Zuniga goes on to note that "one by one, amnesties have been declared null and void in the Americas and those who have passed them or benefitted from them have been discredited in the face of their citizens."

We agree with this statement and express the hope that the Surinamese Court will acknowledge the forward movement of jurisprudence in this sensitive area and will decide in the best long term interests of the Surinamese people.

Signed

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Former Undersecretary for Democracy and Human Rights of Mexico

Carlos Ayala Corao

Former President Inter-American Commission on Human Rights

John Graham

Chair Emeritus, Canadian Foundation for the Americas

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