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January 15, 2007

Santiago Cantón, Executive Secretary
Inter-American Commission on Human Rights
1889 F St., NW
Washington, D.C., USA 20006

Re: Request for a Hearing on the Relationship Between Global Warming and Human Rights

Dear Executive Secretary Cantón,

As representatives of individuals and indigenous peoples who are being impacted by global warming and as public interest organizations with expertise in the legal relationships between the environment and human rights, we hereby request that the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights convene a hearing during its February 26 - March 9 session on the issue of global warming and human rights. The purpose of this hearing would be to assist the Commission in exploring and better understanding the relationship between global warming and human rights.

As you are aware, in the name of numerous Inuit of the Arctic regions of Canada and the United States, Sheila Watt-Cloutier submitted a Petition to the Commission on December 7, 2005, entitled, "Petition to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights Seeking Relief from Violations Resulting from Global Warming Caused by Acts and Omissions of the United States." We are aware that the Commission has dismissed that petition and do not seek here to reopen that decision.

The effects of global warming are already interfering with the realization of the human rights of individuals and peoples throughout the Americas. These impacts are a particular threat to indigenous peoples whose culture is inextricably tied to the environment, and to poorer nations and communities that lack the economic resources necessary to adapt to the profound changes brought about by global warming.

Global warming effects may be catastrophic and include melting sea ice, glaciers, and permafrost; rising sea levels; coastal flooding and erosion, and the loss of small island states and low-lying territories; increased frequency and severity of storms; extinctions of species, including those that humans rely upon for subsistence; prolonged drought and irregular precipitation patterns, threatening agriculture and drinking water supplies; the spread of diseases and disease vectors; increased invasions of exotic species, with resulting negative impacts on native species of plants and animals.

These effects may have dramatic impacts on numerous human rights, such as the right to life, physical integrity and security; the right of indigenous and other resource-dependent peoples to enjoy the benefits of their culture and the right to their own means of subsistence; the right to use and enjoy the lands they have traditionally used and occupied; the right to the preservation of health; rights to residence and movement and inviolability of the home; and the right to use and enjoy personal property without undue interference.

A few specific examples of the impacts global warming is already having on human rights in the Americas include the following:

- In the Arctic regions of Canada and the United States, warmer temperatures are melting sea ice and snow upon which the Inuit people have depended for millennia for cultural activities, transportation and subsistence hunting. Because of the loss of ice and snow, communities have become isolated from one another; hunting, travel and other subsistence activities have become more dangerous or impossible; drinking water sources have been jeopardized; many coastal communities are already threatened or being forced to relocate, while others face increasing risks or costs; and transmission of Inuit culture to younger generations has become difficult or impossible. Among others, these impacts jeopardize the realization of the Inuit's rights to culture, life, health, physical integrity and security, property, and subsistence.
- In the Caribbean, Central America, Venezuela and Uruguay, sea level rise leads to the loss of land and the intrusion of salt-water into freshwater resources, impacting the ability of local communities to farm and to have sufficient freshwater for basic needs. These impacts undermine the realization of the rights to life, health, property and means of subsistence.
- In South America, glaciers are melting at an unprecedented rate. The Chacaltaya Glacier in Bolivia provides water for the city of La Paz, but is predicted to melt completely if present warming trends continue. The rapid melting of these glaciers may cause flooding

in the near term and the complete loss of fresh water in some communities in the longer term, impacting the rights to life, health and property.

- Increased temperatures have affected subsistence agricultural practices throughout the Americas, many of which are directly tied to the survival of indigenous cultures. Indigenous communities in Ecuador and elsewhere are unable to farm in the manner and locations where they have for generations, and are having to choose between subsistence farming and maintaining their cultural ties to land they have lived on and cultivated for generations. These changes thus violate their rights to culture, life, health and means to subsistence.

Scientists now understand that these and other impacts of global warming are caused by human activities. Without serious action by the nations of the hemisphere and the world to regulate activities that contribute to global warming, these human rights violations are certain to become more serious. Projected future impacts include the following:

- In the Arctic, over 180 coastal communities have been identified as requiring relocation in the next several decades, at a cost of more than US\$400 billion. Reductions in sea ice will push some species on which Arctic inhabitants depend, such as polar bear, walrus and ringed seal, to extinction. Animal diseases that can be transmitted to humans will impose increasing health risks. Permafrost degradation has already begun to cause collapse of ground surface, draining of lakes, and toppling of trees.
- Before the end of the decade, the vast Amazon rainforest could be turned into desert, with catastrophic consequences for indigenous communities that depend on its resources.
- In the Caribbean, sea-level rise will cause inundation of coastal areas and islands, shoreline erosion, and destruction of important ecosystems such as wetlands and mangroves. The greatest challenge may be an increased incidence of super hurricanes such as Hurricane Mitch in 1998 whose severe rains resulted in deaths of thousands, largely in Central America

Some governments already regulate these activities and are taking action to ensure that their regulations minimize their contribution to global warming; other governments have refused to recognize their contribution to the problem or to take meaningful steps to address it.

For these reasons, we believe it would be beneficial to the continued realization of human rights in the Americas for the Commission to hold a hearing to further its understanding of the relationship between the impacts of global warming and human rights. Although we would appreciate the Commission's guidance concerning particular issues it would like to explore in a hearing, we would like to propose that the Commission schedule 75 minutes for this important hearing, including 15 to 20 minutes for questions from the Commission. The hearing could include three elements:

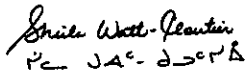
1. A non-technical review of present scientific knowledge of global warming and its impacts on the Americas;

2. A description of the impacts of global warming on human rights, including presentations from representatives of vulnerable indigenous communities that are already experiencing such impacts; and
3. A discussion of the legal relationship between global warming impacts and human rights as defined in the American Declaration on Rights and Duties of Man, the American Convention on Human Rights, and other relevant legal documents. This would include an exploration of issues such as the particular rights implicated, the obligation of states to prevent and mitigate global warming-induced human rights violations, the relevance of the role of private actors in contributing to global warming.

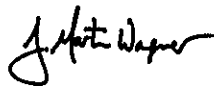
Prior to or at the time of the hearing, we would provide the Commission written materials to assist in the exploration of these issues.

We look forward to your response to this request, and welcome any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



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