



## **United States Embassy Belize** *Press Release*

### **Inter-American Commission on Human Rights by Marc Grossman, Undersecretary of State United States of America**

Respect for human rights is a cornerstone of United States foreign policy. In the Americas and throughout the world, the U.S. supports institutions like the OAS' Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, which recently held its 119<sup>th</sup> regular session in Washington, D.C.

The Commission's reputation for independence has put it on the front lines of the fight to protect human rights in this hemisphere. Governments in Venezuela and Cuba know that the rest of the hemisphere is watching. In Venezuela, a country where media institutions have been harassed, the Commission in 2002 called on the Venezuelan government to "allow for the free flow of ideas and opinions, thereby guaranteeing the full exercise of freedom of expression."

The Commission has described the repression of human rights and civil liberties. In its 2002 report, the Commission criticized the government of Cuba for "violating the people's political rights not just by refusing to hold free elections that meet internationally accepted standards, but also by ignoring the principles of its own Constitution." The Commission cited actions of the Government to thwart efforts by Cuban citizens to peacefully change their laws by petitioning the National Assembly, as provided in the Constitution.

Some critics want to muzzle the Commission. This would be a mistake. The Commission, though supported by the hemisphere's governments, has a high degree of independence in shaping the human rights debate in the Americas. It has been free to criticize the very governments that support it – including the United States. Our support for the Commission's mandate remains strong. Its function remains a vital part of the inter-American system.

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