

**STATEMENT BY CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS
ON THE VI DEFENSE MINISTERS CONFERENCE OF THE AMERICAS¹**

1. We, the undersigned non-governmental organizations, accept thankfully the invitation to participate in the VI Defense Ministers Conference of the Americas requested by civil society organizations in the region. We believe that the participation of civil society actors in this forum, even as observers, is a step in the right direction towards the establishment of citizen diplomacy, in this case, contributing to the transparency and to the outcome of the VI Defense Ministers Conference.

2. We are in full agreement with the declarations made by previous Conferences that democracy, respect for the rule of law, full respect for human rights and international humanitarian law, and the strengthening of multilateralism are essential conditions for sustaining peace and security in the continent.

3. In agreement with the Inter-American Democratic Charter, it is important to recall the third paragraph of the V Defense Ministerial of the Americas, which emphasizes the importance of the constitutional principle of subordination of the armed forces and the security forces to the legally constituted state authorities.

4. In concordance with this forum, we believe that themes such as hemispheric security, mutual trust, and regional or sub-regional cooperation constitute central matters to be discussed, and that more transparent and efficient policies of national defense must be agreed upon in order to successfully confront the challenges posed by the hemispheric situation in matters of security.

5. We also recognize that the current situation in the region is characterized by poverty and social exclusion, as well as increased trafficking in drugs and arms, transnational crime, and terrorism, which constitutes a threat to the rights of citizens and to democratic institutions responsible for guaranteeing these rights. However, we have deep concerns about the inclusion of these practices through an indifferent and ambiguous treatment of the concepts of defense and security in the rough draft of the Declaration of this Defense Ministers Conference².

6. In this context, the *securitization* of problems that may affect security but are fundamentally of a social, economic or political nature, is a practice that is being adopted by many governments in the region. If the text of the Declaration is not modified, this broadened definition will be endorsed by the VI Defense Ministers Conference.

7. In the five previous Defense Ministers Declarations, the joint treatment of defense and security are incipient. However, the draft Declaration of this Conference deepens the conceptual ambiguity, the practical consequences of which undermine the same democratic principles cited in all the Declarations of this forum. The practical consequence of blurring the lines between defense and security is a redefinition of the traditional role for the armed forces in order to involve them in matters of internal and public security. In many countries a sustained increase in the militarization of internal security is becoming evident. There are various reasons for why the participation of the armed forces in handling matters of public security is inappropriate:

- **The de-legitimization of democratic institutions**
- **The de-professionalization of the Armed Forces.**
- **The increase in human rights violations.**
- **The weakening of public security systems.**

¹ This is a short version of a statement signed by 153 non governmental organizations of different countries (attached please find the full document with the signing organizations)

² See paragraphs 3,4,5,6,10,11,14,16,19,20,28 of the rough draft of the Declaration

8. We believe it is important that this conference declares explicitly that **“That defense is a public good that involves the responsibility of society as a whole, and that although the ministers of defense are charged with its democratic formation, the presence of civil society is fundamental in its creation and performance, and its functional arrangement within the political systems of the region.”**

9. Finally, we consider it is important to note that the current expansion of the definitions of defense and security present a risk to governments and civil society actors. Although governments should confront their current threats, it is crucial to take into account the different function and nature of the armed forces and the police forces, and prevent the expansion of the role of the former in Latin America. If these precautions are not implemented, the remedy might be worse than the disease itself. On one hand, the achievements obtained with respect to the role of the military in democratic nations and their subordination to elected civil authorities will be affected. On the other, it would obstruct the democratization of the public security systems in the countries of the region.

SIGNATORY ORGANIZATIONS:

ARGENTINA: Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS). **BRASIL:** Terra de directos - Justiça Global - Plataforma Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, Democracia y Desarrollo. **CANADA:** Droits & Démocratie. **COLOMBIA:** Colectivo de Abogados "José Alvear Restrepo", **ECUADOR:** Centro de Documentación en Derechos Humanos "Segundo Montes Mozo S.J." (CSMM) - Comisión Ecuménica de los Derechos Humanos (CEDHU) - Servicio Paz y Justicia (SERPAJE), **ESTADOS UNIDOS:** Washington Office of Latin America (WOLA), **MEXICO:** Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de las Casas - Centro de Derechos Humanos Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez - Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos, A.C. (CMDPDH) - Red Nacional de Organismos Civiles de Derechos Humanos “todos los derechos para todos” y sus miembros. **PARAGUAY:** Coordinadora Derechos Humanos del Paraguay (CODEHUPY) y sus miembros. **PERÚ:** Coordinadora Nacional de Derechos Humanos y sus miembros - Instituto Libertad y Democracia (IDL). **VENEZUELA:** Comité de Familiares de las Víctimas de los Hechos de Febrero y Marzo de 1989 (COFAVIC). **ORGANIZACIONES INTERNACIONALES:** Centro por la Justicia y el Derecho Internacional (CEJIL), Federación Internacional de Derechos Humanos (FIDH).

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RECOMMENDED MODIFICATIONS TO THE DRAFT DECLARATION

Due to the issues mentioned, we suggest the following modifications to the draft Declaration of the IV Defense Ministerial.

a. That a clear distinction be made between the concepts of defense and security, and that armed forces activities be strictly limited to their sphere of competence. Intervention of the armed forces in matters of internal security will only be permitted in exceptional cases and for the amount of time narrowly tailored to the necessities of the situation.

b. The 3rd paragraph establishes: “that security and defense are public goods that involve the responsibility of society as a whole, and that the democratic formation of security and defense is not exclusively for the armed forces; the presence of civil society is fundamental in their creation and performance, and their functional arrangement within the political systems of the region.” With the purpose of strengthening the principle of subordination of the armed forces to the democratically elected authorities, we suggest the following formulation: **“That defense is a public good that involves the responsibility of society as a whole, and that although the ministers of defense are charged with its democratic formation, the presence of civil society is fundamental in its creation and performance, and its functional arrangement within the political systems of the region.”**

c. We suggest that the 4th paragraph—which establishes the necessity of cooperation, transparency, reciprocity, mutual trust, and effective integration of national defense policies as requisites to ensure the collective security— remain as it is.

d. Paragraph 7 establishes: “that it is each State’s responsibility to promote the transformation and re-conceptualization of the defense and security forces, in terms of their roles, structure, training and acquisition of equipment, focusing on the effective execution of national sovereignty and assuming the new challenges of the XXI century.” To prevent an expansion in the role of the armed forces to include public security, we suggest the this formulation: **“That it is each State’s responsibility to promote the re-conceptualization of the security and defense forces in terms of their roles, structure, training and acquisition of equipment, focusing in the effective execution of the national sovereignty and in assuming the challenges of the XXI century.”**

e. With respect to the paragraphs 28 and 29 of the draft Declaration which refer to the definition of the ties between the OAS and the Inter-American Defense Board, we suggest that they be modified to conform to paragraph 49 of the Declaration on Security in the Americas.¹ The conceptual and practical separation that we propose between defense and security presupposes that the Inter-American Defense Board be defined as a non-operative technical advisory organism, only in matters of military defense.

¹ We reiterate the need to clarify the juridical and institutional relationship between the Inter-American Defense Board (IADB) and the OAS. Thus, we recommend that the Permanent Council, through the Committee on Hemispheric Security, taking into account what is stated in Art. 54, subpar. (a) and (b) of the OAS Charter and in accordance with the criteria set forth in the General Assembly resolutions on this matter, in particular resolution AG/RES. 1240 (XXIII-O/93) - “advice and the delivery of consultancy services of a technical-military character which in no case may have an operational nature”-; resolution AG/RES 1848 (XXXII-O/02) - “including the principle of civilian oversight and the democratic formation of its authorities”-; and AG/RES. 1908 (XXXII-O/02) and AG/RES. 1940 (XXXIII-O/03) - “to provide the OAS with technical, advisory, and educational expertise on defense and security issues”-, complete the analysis of the relationship between the IADB with the OAS and that it submit recommendations to the thirty-fourth regular session of the General Assembly so that it can determine the norms that govern that relationship and the mandate of the IADB. The Permanent Council through the Committee on Hemispheric Security will maintain regular contact with the authorities of the IADB for the purposes of this paragraph.