

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 6, 2021

Tania Reneaum Panszi
Executive Secretary
Inter-American Commission on Human Rights
Organization of American States
1889 F Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20006

Dear Secretary Panszi:

Congratulations on your recent appointment to lead the Commission – a timely selection amid troubling democratic and human rights backsliding in Latin America. In 2013, several of us sent the included letter to previous Commission Executive Secretary Emilio Icaza urging the Commission investigate the suspicious death of Cuban political reformer Oswaldo Payá. With the ninth anniversary of this troubling event soon approaching and a refusal of the Cuban government to allow or provide for a credible investigation into the matter, we once again urge the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to advance its efforts on this case without further delay.

As you likely recall, in 2002 Payá started the Varela Project that sought greater political freedom in Cuba through a peaceful petition drive and referendum process as allowed for in the Cuban constitution. Not only did the Cuban government reject the historic effort and brazenly change the constitutional provision allowing such public avenue for change, but also began a decade of shameful harassment of Payá and his movement.

In July 2012, this persecution culminated in his car being rammed from behind by a tailing government vehicle, resulting in the death of Payá and fellow passenger and youth activist Harold Cepero. The Cuban government has yet to provide a credible explanation, accounting, or justice for this tragic incident. In fact, shortly after his death the United States Senate unanimously passed a resolution honoring Payá's work which also called on the "Government of Cuba to allow an impartial, third-party investigation into the circumstances surrounding the death of Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas."

We hope the Commission's unique role in such matters will help advance such an accounting and continue to stand ready to assist with this important matter.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



Marco Rubio
United States Senator



Robert Menendez
United States Senator



Mark R. Warner
United States Senator



Ted Cruz
United States Senator