

FINAL REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT PANEL  
TO EVALUATE CANDIDACIES FOR THE  
INTER-AMERICAN HUMAN RIGHTS SYSTEM BODIES

May 29, 2025

Members of the Panel SIDH 2025:

- Alejandro Chehtman
- Ariela Peralta
- Gabriela Rodríguez
- Juan Méndez
- Margarette Macaulay
- Robert Goldman

### **Evaluation of the Candidates**

The Panel has evaluated the background and trajectory of each candidate in light of the requirements of the ACHR for the position of Commissioner of the IACHR, in accordance with the text of the treaty and the interpretation made by successive editions of the Independent Panel. A detailed description of the scope of each criterion used by the Panel can be found in Annex 2-a of this report.

#### **Evaluation of the Candidate Reina Auxiliadora Rivera Joya New candidacies for election**

**Procedure before the Panel:** The candidate Reina Auxiliadora Rivera Joya, nominated by Honduras, answered the questionnaire sent by the Secretariat of the Panel on April 17, 2025 and participated in the interview with the Panel on May 1, 2025. The Secretariat received four communications from various organizations regarding the candidate's background and profile.

##### **a) High moral character**

In her response to the questionnaire sent to the Panel, candidate Rivera Joya indicated that she had not received any criminal or disciplinary sanctions or sanctions for violations of codes of ethics. It should be noted that the candidate referred to having received written observations in an administrative context related to her supervisory duties; however, these did not result in formal sanctions, nor did they affect her continuity in or the trust placed in her professional roles.

The Panel received no information to the contrary. There is no record indicating any type of sanction, ethical misconduct or professional impropriety.

##### **b) Recognized competence in human rights**

- *Academic background and professional experience*

According to her résumé, Reina Auxiliadora Rivera Joya holds a law degree from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras (National Autonomous University of Honduras), a Master's degree in Development Management with a Psycho-Social Approach from the Universidad José Cecilio del Valle, and postgraduate diplomas in Criminal Law and Criminal Procedure, as well as in Violence and Social Coexistence, also from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras.

Rivera Joya has teaching experience in the subjects of Development Approaches and Human Rights and Criminal Policy at the Universidad José Cecilio del Valle and the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras, respectively.

In Honduras, she has served as Special Prosecutor for Human Rights, supernumerary trial judge, and judge of the Second Family Trial Court. She has also provided advisory services to the special prosecutors for human rights, women's rights, and environmental protection.

She has been country director of the Swedish Cooperation Agency Diakonia, coordinator of the Violence Observatory of the University Institute for Democracy, Peace and Security (IUDPAZ) and executive director of the Center for Research and Promotion of Human Rights (CIPRODEH).

She is currently working as an external advisor/technical assistance to the United Nations Agency UN Women, in support of the Secretariat of State in the Office of Women's Affairs (SEMUIER Honduras).

The candidate highlighted her role as expert witness before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in the case *Servellón García et al. v. Honduras*.

Rivera Joya also informed the Panel of her membership in several organizations, including the Consejo Consultivo Estado de la Región Centroamérica – Consejo Nacional de Rectores de Universidades de Costa Rica (Advisory Council of the State of the Central America Region – National Council of University Chancellors of Costa Rica), the Ethics Committee of the Country Coordinating Mechanism (MCP-H), CIPRODEH, the Regional Security Working Group – Friedrich Ebert Foundation Central America, the Consejo Nacional de Seguridad Interior (CONASIN) (National Council for Internal Security), and the Centro de Derechos de Mujeres (CDM) (Center for Women's Rights).

- ***Knowledge of Inter-American standards and challenges of the IAHRs***

Candidate Rivera Joya noted in her response to the questionnaire that one of the main challenges facing the IAHRs is the advance of authoritarian agendas in several States in the region. These trends have led to normative backsliding, discursive attacks on the system itself, shrinking civic space, and the criminalization of human rights defenders.

She added that these challenges are compounded by growing political polarization, the weakening of multilateralism, and a structural financial crisis that threatens the long-term sustainability of the IAHRs. She also emphasized that procedural delays, normative fragmentation, and the lack of universal ratification of human rights treaties continue to limit the system's effective reach.

In response to these challenges, Rivera Joya stated that the IACHR must act with legal rigor, while also embracing institutional creativity, humility in listening to communities, and strategic adaptability. Its role, she added, must balance its function as a guarantor of rights with that of a bridge for structured dialogue with States, a catalyst for the testimony and memory of victims, and a promoter of practical solutions that enhance the system's legitimacy. In her interview with the Panel, she further suggested that joint strategies between the IACHR and United Nations systems should be strengthened to reinforce the broader human rights protection framework in the face of regressive governments.

Rivera Joya was also asked for her opinion on the IACHR's interpretations of the ACHR, and whether any of them should be reconsidered. She responded that there are areas where a critical, context-sensitive review is warranted—particularly regarding the rights and participation of Indigenous peoples. While acknowledging the IACHR's advances in establishing standards for prior consultation and Indigenous jurisdiction, she observed that a top-down logic still prevails. This logic, she argued, fails to fully recognize the epistemic and political autonomy of Indigenous peoples. As a result, Indigenous legal frameworks are still viewed as merely “complementary,” rather than as legal systems with equal standing and intrinsic value—even in the design of standards or friendly settlement processes.

With respect to the current rapporteurships, Rivera Joya emphasized that they must preserve their technical independence, while also being more strongly integrated into the IACHR's plenary structure as part of a coordinated institutional strategy. She stressed the need to strengthen their operational capacity, clarify their role in advancing the cross-cutting approaches outlined in the institutional strategic plan, and promote greater territorial presence, coordination between rapporteurships, and engagement with community knowledge.

Finally, she proposed a number of measures to improve the IACHR's effectiveness. These included strengthening its internal strategic planning and financial sustainability through partnerships with international cooperation in key thematic or geographic areas; promoting mechanisms to ease procedural backlog, such as new models for friendly settlements; and expanding structured dialogue with States on the structural causes of human rights violations. She concluded by emphasizing the importance of enabling more meaningful participation by victims, communities, and peoples at every stage of the system—as political and epistemic actors in their own right.

- ***Diligence and other relevant skills***

Regarding her dedication as a Commissioner, candidate Rivera Joya stated that, if elected, her priority would be the rigorous and full implementation of the mandate entrusted to her by the IACHR. To that end, she expressed her willingness to step down from her role providing technical assistance to UN Women, in order to avoid any ethical or time-related conflicts of interest and to ensure active and responsible engagement.

In response to questions about her knowledge of or experience with legal systems other than that of her home country, Rivera Joya explained that she has worked with regulatory frameworks from various Latin American countries through comparative legal research, legislative drafting, and the design of public policies with a human rights-based approach. This work has enabled her to

become familiar with variations of the continental European legal tradition present in the region. However, she acknowledged that she does not have direct experience with Anglo-Saxon legal systems or with Indigenous ancestral justice systems.

With respect to her language skills, she indicated that her native language is Spanish and that she has a limited command of English.

### **c) Independence, impartiality and absence of conflicts of interest**

The candidate acknowledged the possibility of a conflict of interest in processes, reports, or strategies she was previously involved in—as a public official, consultant, or member of civil society or international organizations—should they come before the IACHR.

She was specifically asked about her participation in civil society movements advocating for human rights and any potential conflicts this could pose for her candidacy and the functions she would assume as Commissioner. Rivera Joya responded that she has been actively and consistently involved in such movements, both in Honduras and across the region, through advocacy platforms, protection networks, and documentation and research efforts. She also noted that she has worked closely with at-risk communities and human rights defenders. In such cases, she affirmed that if a matter were presented to the IACHR in which she had been directly involved, or where there could be a relationship that might compromise her impartiality, she would immediately recuse herself. The candidate does not currently hold a position in any human rights organization or movement that presents a conflict of interest or the appearance of a conflict of interest.

She was also asked about potential conflicts of interest arising from her previous roles as a public servant. Rivera Joya explained that she has served as a judge in criminal and family courts, and as a human rights prosecutor in the Public Prosecutor's Office. Additionally, she has contributed to the development of public policies within state institutions. She noted that she is currently providing technical assistance to the Secretariat of State in the Office of Women's Affairs in Honduras, through a part-time consultancy with UN Women. She affirmed that if a case were to involve decisions made in this context, or persons or institutions directly linked to that collaboration, she would disclose the situation and request recusal. In her interview with the Panel, she further stated that, if elected, she would fully renounce any roles or activities that could compromise her objectivity.

### **d) Contribution to the balanced and representative composition of the organization.**

Candidate Rivera Joya emphasized her extensive professional experience across government, civil society, and international cooperation, particularly in the defense of human rights, the strengthening of democracy, and the development of concrete protection mechanisms. She expressed her commitment to ensuring that the IACHR remains a body that is close to victims, grounded in its principles, and capable of strategically addressing the most pressing challenges in the region.

She also underscored the significance of her geographic origin, noting that Central America has historically been underrepresented within the composition of the IACHR, despite facing serious challenges related to violence, authoritarianism, corruption, and structural exclusion.

### **e) National nomination process**

In her questionnaire, the candidate noted that no public or competitive nomination process took place in Honduras. She explained that her nomination resulted from an initiative of the Chancellor of the Republic, as part of a broader policy to increase Honduras's participation in international organizations—responding to the country's historical underrepresentation in these spaces.

Rivera Joya indicated that, since the formalization of her candidacy, she has held meetings with national human rights organizations to inform them of her nomination and to gather their feedback. She added that her government sponsored a presentation tour in the United States, during which she met with diplomatic missions from the Permanent Council of the OAS and with civil society organizations based in Washington, D.C.

In her interview with the Panel, the candidate suggested that the IACHR could develop a standard for selection processes, in order to gradually reduce the discretion States currently have to nominate individuals who may serve the interests of a particular government.

### **Conclusion**

The Panel concludes that candidate Reina Auxiliadora Rivera Joya meets the evaluation criteria set forth in the Inter-American instruments for election as a Commissioner of the IACHR.

The Panel considers that her role as an expert witness before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, as well as her current work with UN Women, will enable her to adapt effectively to the work of the IACHR.

She also demonstrated substantive knowledge of human rights and an understanding of the current challenges facing the IAHRs, for which she proposed some alternatives for addressing them.

The Panel found no impediments to her independence or impartiality that would disqualify her from serving as a Commissioner of the IACHR.

The Panel underscores that this candidacy would contribute to gender parity and to a more geographically representative composition of the IACHR.

Finally, the Panel notes that Honduras lacks a public and participatory nomination mechanism for appointments to the bodies of the IAHRs, and that Rivera Joya's candidacy was directly proposed by the national authorities.