

International Coalition Petitions Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to Investigate Factory Farm Abuses

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Indigenous and human-rights groups, conservationists, scientists, doctors and public-health experts [petitioned the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights](#) today to hold a formal hearing on human-rights abuses caused by factory farms, also known as industrial animal feeding operations, across North America and South America.

The groups are requesting that the commission, which monitors human rights within the Organization of American States, hold a “thematic” hearing to compile information about human-rights abuses resulting from the unchecked expansion of industrial animal feeding operations and issue a report with recommendations to address those abuses. A thematic hearing could increase public awareness of, and draw additional attention to, the grave human-rights abuses caused by these operations.

The 19 petitioning groups include representatives from Argentina, Mexico, Chile, Ecuador and the United States. The request is additionally supported by 127 organizations and 151 academics, experts and individuals.

Many of the parties joining today’s request represent Indigenous tribes, such as Mayan tribes in the Yucatán Peninsula in Mexico, whose rights of self-determination, autonomy and self-governance have consistently been ignored as industrial animal feeding operations have expanded in the region. Those rights include the rights to free, prior and informed

consent and consultation before the approval of any activity that affects Indigenous territory.

“The government has authorized a 49,000-pig farm in our Mayan territory that is located in two natural protected areas,” said Doroteo Hau of Guardianes de los Cenotes, México. “We organized ourselves to resist the operation, we held a consultation process, and the people said no to the farm. Water is the most important thing, and we know the farm will damage the water. Scientists say our soil is karstic, we say it is porous, and everything seeps into the groundwater. We are defending what is ours and what will be for our children.”

The expansion of industrial animal feeding operations has caused a range of human rights abuses across the American continents, according to the petition. Those abuses include direct harm to human health and drinking-water contamination, both of which constitute violations of the right to a healthy environment.

“In Chile we can no longer sustain megafarms,” said Andrea Cisneros, of Movimiento Socioambiental Valle del Huasco, Chile. “We live in a country where all the water is privately owned and the little that is left is contaminated. In addition, these operations produce nauseating odors that do not allow us to live or enjoy our daily lives.”

“In Ecuador, intensive animal husbandry megafarms cause pollution around rivers that communities use for their food sovereignty,” said Xavier León Vega, of Acción Ecológica, Ecuador. “Despite this, these megafarms continue to expand thanks to financing from international organizations such as the World Bank.”

Many of the abuses detailed in today’s request occur alongside threats and other intimidation by agribusiness interests looking to continue with business as usual to the detriment of neighboring communities. Reports indicate that 2020 was [the deadliest year](#) to date for environmental activists and Indigenous defenders. Agribusiness, logging and mining interests are considered key drivers of the violence.

“In the province of Chaco, Argentina, in 2020, the executive branch signed an agreement with the company Feng Tian Food as part of a Strategic Partnership Agreement with China for the installation of integrated pig production complexes,” said Nora Gimenez, of Conciencia Solidaria, part of Colectivo Somos Monte Argentina. “This generated a lot of resistance among the population that mobilized and protested the agreement despite facing intimidation from the provincial police that included following people, power cuts and threats to impose fines. The lack of official information on the agreement and the repression has extended the conflict from the city to the municipalities where we have never been able to obtain official information.”

Today’s request details the grave harms to human health and the environment associated with the expansion of the factory farming industry across the Americas. These harms include contamination of water, including naturally occurring freshwater wells known as cenotes, emission of noxious air pollution, the spread of dangerous pathogens and contributions to climate change.

“Living with clean air and water is a fundamental human right that the factory farming industry tramples with impunity,” said Hannah Connor, an attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity. “On behalf of the people across the Americas suffering at the hands

of this destructive industry, we hope the commission will hear our call and investigate these human rights abuses.”

Today’s request is being filed on behalf of 19 groups: ARTICLE 19 México y Centroamérica, Acción Ecológica, Asociación Interamericana para la Defensa del Ambiente (AIDA), Cátedra Libre de Soberanía Alimentaria de la Escuela de Nutrición de la Universidad de Buenos Aires, Center for Biological Diversity, Centro de Información sobre Empresas y Derechos Humanos (CIEDH), Colectivo de Derechos Humanos Yopoi, Conciencia Solidaria, Earthjustice, Indignación, Promoción y Defensa de los Derechos Humanos (Indignación), Kanan Derechos Humanos, Guardianes de los cenotes “Kanan Ts’ono’ot”, Greenpeace México, Movimiento Socioambiental Valle del Huasco, Museo del Hambre, Red de Abogadas y Abogados por la Soberanía Alimentaria (REDASA), Representantes de la Infancia de Homún, Seminario sobre el Derecho Humano a la Alimentación Adecuada de la Facultad de Derecho de la UBA and Waterkeeper Alliance. The request is additionally supported by 127 organizations and 151 academics, experts and individuals.

View the request in [English](#).

View the request in [Spanish](#).

Background

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights is a quasi-judicial body that promotes and protects human rights as part of the Inter-American Human Rights System. The regional system was created to monitor and ensure the protection of human rights within the 35 member states of the Organization of American States, including Argentina, Mexico, Chile, Ecuador and the United States.

Nongovernmental organizations in member states have the right to request that the commission hold a thematic hearing on human-rights abuses. Thematic hearings are used to compile up-to-date information about a particular human-rights issue in one or more member states. Hearings take place at the commission’s headquarters in Washington, D.C. and virtually during the COVID-19 pandemic. The commission has the discretion to accept or reject thematic hearing requests based on its assessment of the need to monitor a particular issue.

Thematic hearings can address a wide range of human-rights concerns. Recent hearings have, for example, dealt with the human rights effects of environmental issues such as fracking, large dams and the right to water. Hearings have also dealt with solitary confinement, juvenile justice, national security, Indigenous rights, racial discrimination, human trafficking, rights of migrants and farmworkers, excessive use of force, detention at the U.S.-Mexico border and stand-your-ground laws.

For additional information on thematic hearings at the Inter-American Human Rights Commission, please see this [report](#).

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