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BRAZIL SILENCING INDIGENOUS VOICES DURING THE ANNUAL INTER-AMERICAN WEEK FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

[WASHINGTON, D.C., AUGUST 2020] -- Brazil has blocked an indigenous woman from addressing the Organization of American States Permanent Council during the O.A.S. Inter-American Week for Indigenous Peoples (August 5-12, 2020). We condemn this deplorable, dangerous act.

In preparation for the Week, the O.A.S. asked indigenous peoples and organizations to select an indigenous leader to address the Permanent Council on August 7, 2020. We believed that it would be very important to nominate Francinara Soares Martins, the Coordinator General of the Coordination of the Indigenous Organizations of the Brazilian Amazon (COIAB), the largest regional indigenous organization in Brazil, to speak to the Permanent Council about the impacts of COVID-19 on indigenous peoples. However, upon learning of her nomination, Brazil blocked it. Brazil's panicked attempt to silence Francinara Soares is yet another unmistakable mark of the racism, lawlessness, and oppression that characterize the government of Brazil.

Brazil has much to hide -- overt actions and policies to deny the rights of indigenous peoples, withholding medical services to these most vulnerable people, using the pandemic as a cover up to pass laws to dismantle environmental protections, encouraging illegal invasions of indigenous lands and promoting deforestation on these lands, and much more. This government even refuses to obey the decision of its own Supreme Court to protect indigenous peoples, especially those in isolation or recent contact, from the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Brazil is silencing an indigenous leader who would speak out against these and other human rights violations. To do this is wholly against the purposes and principles of the O.A.S. and a disgrace to the organization. It is shameful that the O.A.S. is allowing Brazil to silence an indigenous leader. For the O.A.S. to celebrate the "Inter-American Week for Indigenous Peoples" without the representation and participation of elected leaders of indigenous peoples and indigenous organizations from the Americas is a travesty.

To silence an indigenous advocate for indigenous rights is an offense against the values and goals that form and support all human rights. The very purpose of human rights is to be a shield against the worst harms and injustices of governments. We condemn this blatant discrimination. We demand that the O.A.S. publicly explain this action.

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