

Roundtable on Risk of Reprisals

Remarks by Victoria Márquez-Mees, MICI Director

Bienvenida Sra. Alta Comisionada Michelle Bachelet, our warmest welcome to you and our appreciation for taking the time to meet with us today. For us at the Inter-American Development Bank and particularly to the team at the Independent Consultation and Investigation Mechanism of the IDB Group it is particularly important to have you lead the human rights agenda at this time, not only because of your long tradition as a human rights champion, but also as a prominent female from the Latin American region where awareness and action on the protection of human rights is greatly needed.

Development finance institutions face a fundamental role in changing the future of our planet, there is no doubt that we require strong investments to ensure that communities all over the world improve their living conditions and can have access to better education, health, jobs.

However, these investments have at times failed to achieve the sustainable development goals which are their objective, affecting those communities that are in greater need of support and help. This has led to the erosion of trust, to communities raising their voices against projects undertaken without taking them into consideration, to conflict and in general to a growing complexity in which to promote sustainable development.

Accountability mechanisms, like the MICI at IDB, the Inspection Panel at WB and the CAO at the IFC among others, have been created by our institutions to ensure that communities have access to redress for the harm generated by their investments. However, our work cannot be adequately performed when communities fear reprisals due to their voicing their concerns.

Reprisals, which can take many forms, impact the sustainability of the work of international financial institutions, not only because communities are fearful of filing a complaint, but also because it impedes

civil participation, it blocks the right to consultation, it limits the possibility of our institutions getting useful information on impacts a vital link of the way we do business. There is no way we can assess the environmental and social risks of a project if the people to be impacted cannot voice their views and opinions. If voicing concerns means your neighbors will ostracize you, that the security forces of a project will harm you, if retaliation for opposition implies you will not be able to get gainful employment, if filing a complaint with MICI or CAO or IP will put your family or yourself in danger: then we are part of the problem, not the solution which brought us to work in development.

We have seen an increase in the volume of complaints requiring confidentiality due to fear of reprisals, we have witnessed the impacts of retaliation and intimidation in communities opposed to a project, we have had to devise a methodology to, along with complainants, assess the risk of our intervention so as to establish measures to reduce the risks. That is why we commissioned this Toolkit, so as to be better equipped to respond to a grim reality.

However, this is not something that a Mechanism can tackle by itself, we need the support of our colleagues at Management, who are also seeing their side of the work impacted by this situation, to take a stand, to protect the communities we work for, and if we are unable to protect them directly, to at least take care that our investments do not increase the risks.

If we want to obtain sustainable outcomes, we need to make sure that communities can voice their concerns as their ultimate goal is the same that we all have as human beings: to protect our families, our heritage and our living conditions. No one we have met in our case has been opposed to development, they just have been opposed to being harmed.

Let us work together to ensure that with our work we achieve our mission of improving lives.

April 12th, 2019