

## **Open Letter in Support of Justice and Accountability for the November 2019 Coup d'état in Bolivia and Crimes Committed by the De Facto Government of Jeanine Áñez**

September 15, 2021

We, the undersigned, support efforts by the government of the Plurinational State of Bolivia to bring to justice those responsible for crimes related to the November 2019 coup d'état that ousted Bolivia's democratically elected government. We support the prosecution of former *de facto* president, Jeanine Áñez, and members of her cabinet. We demand a full investigation into the roles of the United States government and the Organization of American States (OAS) in these events.

We note that Bolivian rights groups and attorneys have made recommendations for justice and accountability. Governments have a responsibility to investigate human rights crimes and to hold perpetrators responsible because international law requires that victims of crimes have the right to due process. A government accountable for violations of human rights is an important step in the transition to democracy.

As groups and individuals based primarily in the United States, we note the long history of US government interference in Bolivia's internal politics, undermining its democratic institutions and supporting coups d'états. The US State Department has long sought to undermine the government of Evo Morales through various means, including threats of funding cutoffs from multilateral institutions and support for Bolivia's right-wing opposition, including individuals and groups linked to violent and racist extremists.

Key figures involved in the 2019 coup received training in the US, including Williams Kaliman, the head of the military at the time, and Vladimir Yuri Calderón Marisal, who became police commander following the coup. The US government helped to advance the election fraud narrative that provided the pretext for the coup and approved Morales's ouster. The US ambassador to the OAS reportedly guided OAS involvement in Bolivia around the elections and urged it to support the coup, according to [\*The Los Angeles Times\*](#).

The 2019 coup was marked by racism and violence against Bolivia's sizable Indigenous population. While many incidents of racist violence marked the period leading up to, and then following, the coup, most notable and horrific were two massacres that killed at least 22 people, within a week of the Áñez government taking power. In the Sacaba Massacre on November 15, 2019, police and military opened fire on a march organized in opposition to anti-Indigenous

violence and government abuses. The demonstrators were unarmed, and the violence was one-sided, with no reported police or military casualties. Another massacre, outside the Senkata gas plant in El Alto, followed on November 19, 2019. As at Sacaba, all the casualties were Indigenous, and again, the massacre was an episode of repression of protest in defense of Indigenous rights — this time, in part a reaction to the Sacaba Massacre.

Following these horrific events, the de facto government failed to “conduct a prompt, effective, impartial, and transparent investigation” into either massacre, which led to a loss of forensic evidence, and there was obstruction of the limited investigations that did happen. The persecution did not end with the massacres. State forces attacked a funeral procession for massacre victims two days later, on November 21, and government officials reportedly targeted children in the Senkata area, with police officers going to a local high school and “intimidating” students in the week following the Senkata Massacre.

The victims of these massacres and their families deserve justice. Efforts by Bolivia’s justice system to hold the perpetrators accountable, including the authorities who ordered the use of live ammunition and deadly force, merit the respect and support of the international community.

The OAS played an instrumental role in undermining public faith in Bolivia’s 2019 elections, leading opponents of Evo Morales and/or opponents of Morales’s MAS party to reject the official results and take to the streets. *The New York Times* [reported](#) in June 2020: “The organization’s statement ... heightened doubts about the fairness of the vote and fueled a chain of events that changed the South American nation’s history. The opposition seized on the claim to escalate protests, gather international support, and push Mr. Morales from power with military support weeks later.” The *Times* refers to unsubstantiated OAS [claims](#) made the day after the October 20, 2019 elections, that there had been a “drastic and hard-to-explain change in the trend of the preliminary results after the closing of the polls.” Despite a letter from [133 economists and other statisticians](#) explaining how Morales’s victory in the first-round was entirely predictable, and despite [several](#) academic [studies](#) showing that there was [no evidence of fraud](#) or irregularities [sufficient to alter the results](#), the OAS continued to perpetuate the narrative that Morales’s victory was due to fraud. OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro was the main proponent of this story and lent support publicly to the post-coup government and the far-right, racist supporters of the coup, including Luis Fernando Camacho, with [whom he met](#) a month after the coup.

The OAS role providing pretext and support for the coup has been condemned by some individual OAS member delegations, including Mexico, and questions have been raised in the US Congress, which allocates the majority of the OAS’s budget. In November 2019, four members of Congress [demanded](#) answers from OAS Secretary General Almagro regarding its statements about election fraud. When Almagro had still not answered these questions over nine months later, two of the congressional representatives, Rep. Jan Schakowsky and Rep. Chuy Garcia, both Democrats from Illinois, wrote [an op-ed](#) calling for an official investigation into the OAS role in

the coup.

To support Bolivia's sovereign and independent processes for justice and accountability for the 2019 coup d'état, a terrible crime, and for the many related and subsequent crimes by post-coup officials, we appeal:

**To the members of the US Congress seeking answers on the OAS role in Bolivia's elections and the subsequent coup:**

These questions are crucial. We encourage you to continue to demand answers and accountability for the OAS's actions and to determine which OAS member delegations were responsible for steering the OAS response to events in Bolivia and the sequence of events that guided the OAS's actions and statements. We call on you to hold the OAS, and in particular Luis Almagro, accountable for its role in undermining faith in Bolivia's elections and electoral process and in enabling and encouraging the illegal removal of the elected Morales government. We also call on you to demand an accounting of US funds sent to Bolivia via USAID, the National Endowment for Democracy and its core grantees, and other groups and agencies that have supported Bolivian opposition groups and fostered divisions in the past.

**To the OAS member delegations:**

We urge you to press the Office of the Secretary General of the OAS and the OAS Department of Electoral Cooperation and Observation for an explanation of the statements and decisions that the OAS made around the 2019 elections in Bolivia and the subsequent coup.

**To US attorneys who practice before the Inter-American system:**

We urge you to join our effort to demand accountability from the OAS leadership for its clear violation of the OAS Charter and the American Convention on Human Rights and the US government for its contribution to the 2019 coup and massacres in Bolivia.

**To the Biden administration:**

We expect you to abide by the Leahy Law, and the OAS Charter and the UN Charter, that prohibit you from participating in any activities that undermine another country's sovereignty. Weapons sales, training, monetary and other forms of support must not go to figures involved in the 2019 coup or in other attempts to destabilize any elected government. We urge you to reject military solutions to social and political problems, whether through foreign or US militaries. Respect the national sovereignty of Bolivia and all other independent nations by honoring their forms of participatory democracy and representative democratic institutions.

**The Undersigned:****Organizational Signatories:**

- National Lawyers Guild International Committee
- Project Blueprint
- Asociación Americana de Juristas (AAJ)
- Asociación Venezolana de Juristas
- Chicago ALBA Solidarity
- CODEPINK
- Democratic Lawyers Association of Bangladesh
- Foundation for Economic and Social Justice
- Frantz Fanon Foundation
- Hilton Head for Peace
- Indian Association of Lawyers
- International Association of Democratic Lawyers
- International League of Peoples Struggles Workers Commission
- Latin America Solidarity Committee
- La Voz se los de Abajo
- Nakuru Reproductive Health Centre, Kenya
- National Union of Peoples' Lawyers (Philippines)
- NorCal Resist
- Samidoun Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity Network
- Sures
- Task Force on the Americas
- Ukrainian Association of Democratic Lawyers
- Western New York Peace Center

**Individual Signatories:**

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