



The Bernard and Audre
RAPOPORT CENTER
For Human Rights and Justice
The University of Texas at Austin
School of Law

PRESS RELEASE
October 16, 2008

**University of Texas Working Group to Testify
on Human Rights Impacts of the Texas/Mexico Border Wall**

AUSTIN, Texas (October 16, 2008) – In response to its claim that the Texas-Mexico border wall violates human rights law, the University of Texas Working Group on Human Rights and the Border Wall was granted a general hearing before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (the “Commission”). The Commission, comprised of seven independent jurists from across the Americas and the Caribbean, is the body of the inter-governmental Organization of American States (“OAS”) responsible for monitoring and ensuring respect for human rights in the Americas, including in the United States. The public hearing will be held from 4:30-5:30 p.m. on October 22, 2008 in the Commission’s Washington, D.C. headquarters and simultaneously webcast to a global audience through the OAS website.

The Working Group, a multi-disciplinary collective of faculty and students at the University of Texas whose work was facilitated by the Rapoport Center for Human Rights and Justice at UT School of Law, submitted a series of briefing papers on the border wall to the Commission in June 2008 and then followed up with a request for a general hearing in August 2008. The Working Group further requested that a high ranking policy official from the Department of Homeland Security participate in the hearing.

“It is unfortunate that we must go to an international forum to address the actions of the United States on its own border, but we are very pleased that this important human rights body will consider the extremely harmful impacts of the wall through a human rights lens,” said Denise Gilman, Clinical Professor at the University of Texas School of Law and member of the Working Group. At the hearing, the Working Group will present its arguments to the Commission that the border wall violates a number of provisions of the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man (the “American Declaration”), including rights to private property, freedom of investigation and expression, private and family life and culture, judicial protection, and equality before the law.

The Working Group will describe the difficulties it has faced in obtaining essential information from the U.S. government, including the precise planned locations for the wall and any consideration given to the impact the wall will have on traditional Native American ceremonial lands. The Working Group’s requests under the Freedom of Information Act have gone without answer since April of this year.

The Working Group will also offer a statistical analysis spearheaded by UT Brownsville Environmental Studies Professor Jeff Wilson, which demonstrates that the location of the wall disproportionately affects poor, less educated Latino families. Part of the hearing will be dedicated to testimony by Margo Tamez, who is Lipan Apache and whose family has owned property directly affected by the wall for generations, tracing back to land grants from the Spanish crown. In addition, the Working Group will provide written statements from the Kickapoo Tribe of Texas and Dr. Juliet Garcia, President of the University of Texas at Brownsville.

The Working Group will seek a recommendation by the Commission that the United States halt construction of the border wall in Texas, given the likelihood that serious violations of the American Declaration are already taking place and that further violations are imminent as a result of the U.S. government's actions. The Working Group will also ask the Commission to issue a formal request of information to the U.S. government, including a requirement that it respond to the Working Group's briefing papers.

The University of Texas School of Law, through the Rapoport Center and the Immigration Clinic, is involved in three additional hearings during the October session of the Commission. A media alert providing information on all four hearings is available at:

www.utexas.edu/law/academics/centers/humanrights/publications/MediaAdvisory_CommissionHearings.pdf

The hearing on the Texas/Mexico border wall and all other hearings will take place on the Terrace Level of the General Secretariat Building of the OAS, located at 1889 F Street, NW, Washington, D.C.

Instructions for watching live video stream or obtaining audio recordings are available at the Commission's website: <http://www.cidh.org/Prensa/guidelinespresscoverageENGL.htm>

The full text of the Working Groups' briefing papers on the border wall is available at:

<http://www.utexas.edu/law/academics/centers/humanrights/publications/>

For further information please contact:

Denise Gilman

(512) 232-7796

(202) 607-8376 (cell)

dgilman@law.utexas.edu

Ariel E Dulitzky

(512) 232-1256

(512) 529-6520 (cell)

adulitzky@law.utexas.edu

Karen Engle

(512) 232-7066

(512) 694-5392 (cell)

kengle@law.utexas.edu

Rapoport Center for

Human Rights and Justice

(512) 232-4857

Bernard and Audre Rapoport Center for Human Rights and Justice: www.rapoportcenter.org