



## **REGIONAL MEETING STRENGTHENING THE AUTONOMY OF PUBLIC DEFENDER'S OFFICES IN THE AMERICAS**

Virtual Event  
October 13, 2022  
4 p.m. Chile time

### **Background**

Judicial independence and the autonomy of justice institutions and their operators have been identified as some of the priority challenges facing the countries of the Americas according to information gathered by JSCA for the development of its 2022-2026 Strategic Plan. In order to address this issue, the Justice Studies Center of the Americas (JSCA) has partnered with the Inter-American Association of Public Defender's Offices, the National Ombudsman's Office of Argentina, the National Public Defense Office of the Dominican Republic, and the Criminal Public Defender's Office of Chile to organize the regional meeting "Strengthening the Autonomy of Public Defender's Offices in the Americas", with the support of Global Affairs Canada (GAC).

### **Context**

The Justice Studies Center of the Americas (JSCA) recently developed its 2022-2026 Strategic Plan through a broad, inclusive and participatory process. A total of 760 representatives of justice institutions, civil society, academia, international agencies and other entities from the Americas took part in it.

During that process, the Center identified that one of the main challenges that justice systems and particularly public defender's offices face is *"...internal and external threats that place the independence of justice institutions at risk, and which are manifested on different levels and in different ways that range from open and clearly illegitimate to veiled and subtle in a context of political polarization."* (Our translation.)

One way to protect this independence is to strengthen the autonomy of public defender's offices. This agenda of autonomy has various expressions depending on the institutional and regulatory arrangements that support the very existence of public defender's offices in the various countries of the region. In some countries, autonomy is understood as a "structural autonomy" similar to that which public prosecutor's offices can have. In others, it is seen as "functional autonomy" in which the public defender's office has autonomy over its management and public defenders' performance even though it is part of the organic structure of another institution such as the judiciary or justice ministry depending on the country.

In any case, one of the key aspects of the design of the region's public defender's offices is related to the independence and autonomy that its operators should have so that the exercise of their main role -effective defense of individuals who require their services- is free of any internal or



external pressure or interference that may impact their performance and the quality of the services provided. These entities must also have enough resources and capacities to be able to provide quality service subject to adequate performance standards.

In this context, some of the topics that this discussion will cover are:

- a) Key elements of the discussion of the need for autonomous public defender's offices;
- b) How to safeguard adequate performance standards for public defenders;
- c) Elements that contribute to or undermine the autonomy of public defender's offices;  
and
- d) Experiences and the current situation in the region.

## Objective

To establish the current situation of the autonomy of public defender's offices in countries in Latin America and its impact on the quality of the services provided to the public, identifying and describing best practices and obstacles to their progress.

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Time	Topic	Participants
4:00-4:05 p.m.	Opening Remarks	Nataly Ponce Executive Director, JSCA
4:05-4:25 p.m.	The Evolution and Strengthening of Autonomous Public Defense at the Regional Level	Stella Maris Martínez Director of Argentina's National Public Defender's Office
4:25-4:45 p.m.	The Dominican Experience of Strengthening Autonomous Public Defender's Offices	Rodolfo Valentín Santos National Public Defender of the Dominican Republic
4:45-5:05 p.m.	Performance Standards and Quality of Public Defense Services	Carlos Mora National Public Defender of Chile
5:05-5:25 p.m.	Reflections and Contributions Based on the Experience of Paraguay	Lorena Segovia National Public Defender of Paraguay
5:25-5:45 p.m.	Comments and Discussion of the Current Situation in the Region	Andrés Mahnke Regional Expert
5:45-6:10 p.m.	Reflections and Questions	Nataly Ponce Executive Director, JSCA
6:10-6:15 p.m.	Closing Remarks – representative of JSCA Board of Directors	