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1078

Australian Judge Elected as President of ICJ Bangalore India

Justice Michael Kirby was elected President of the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) at its Triennial Meeting held in Bangalore, India which concluded Saturday. Justice Kirby, 56, who is the President of the Court of Appeal of New South Wales, Australia, and also of the Court of Appeal of Solomon Islands, is the first Australian elected to the post of President. The last President of ICJ was Dr. Joaquin Ruiz Jimenez, the former Ombudsman of Spain. Justice Kirby has been a Commissioner of the ICJ since 1984. Amongst other international posts which he holds is that of Special Representative for human rights in Cambodia of the United Nations Secretary General.

The ICJ, founded in 1952, is one of the oldest human rights organizations in the world. It consists of judges, lawyers and law teachers in all parts of the world. Its focus of attention has been upon maintenance of the Rule of Law, human rights and defence of the independence of the judiciary and of the legal profession throughout the world. The current Commissioners of the ICJ include the President of the International Court of Justice, the President of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, judges of the highest courts in Canada, New Zealand, Senegal, Hungary, South Africa and other countries and leading lawyers from 40 countries. The Secretary-General of the United Nations (Dr. Boutros Boutros Ghali) and the President of Ireland (Mrs. Mary Robinson) are amongst lawyers who have recently served on the ICJ Commission.

At the same meeting, the ICJ elected a new Executive Committee to be headed by Mr. Fali Nariman, former Solicitor-General of India and a long time leader of the legal profession in that country. Mr. Nariman has been a Commissioner of the ICJ since 1983.

Also elected were:

Vice Presidents:

Dr. Dalmo de Abreu Dallari (Brazil)
Justice Enoch Dumbutshena (Zimbabwe)
Mr. Desmond Fernando (Sri Lanka)
Justice Lennart Groll (Sweden)
Mrs. Justice Claire l'Heureux-Dubé (Canada)
Prof. Ewa Letowska (Poland)

Executive Committee:

Mrs. Vera de Melo Duarte Martins (Cape Verde)
Dr. Diego Garcia-Sayan (Peru)
Sir William Goodhart, QC (UK)
Ms. Asma Khader (Jordan)
Mr. Kofi Kumado (Ghana)
Mr. Theo Van Boven (Netherlands)

The meeting of the ICJ Commissioners in Bangalore adopted a resolution warning against the granting of impunity to persons accused of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Commissioners warned that any attempt to circumvent the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, established by the United Nations in 1993, would be contrary to international law. They cautioned that any attempt to build peace otherwise than on a foundation of truth and justice would be unstable and unlikely to prove enduring. The granting of amnesty to persons against whom reliable allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity were made should not be allowed. The perpetrators must be brought to justice, declared the leading judges and lawyers gathered at the Bangalore meeting.

The Conference of ICJ Commissioners in Bangalore was preceded by a 3 day Conference on Economic, Social and Cultural Human Rights. The Conference adopted a Plan of Action which urged the involvement of judges and lawyers in the attainment of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights by way of legal process. The Secretary-General of the ICJ, Mr. Adama Dieng signed the Action Plan, stating:

"We are not downgrading civil and political rights. We are simply appealing to judges and lawyers everywhere to see the legitimate role of the law to address the vital issues of economic, social and cultural rights. To ordinary citizens, who never enter a court room or a police station, the most urgent human rights are often those concerned with access to medical care, education, food and housing. The meeting in India is a timely reminder of the way in which the legal profession and the judiciary can use legal process to stimulate the provision of economic, social and cultural rights. The lawyers and courts of India have often shown the way in this regard. We can all learn from India and take this message back to judges and lawyers in all parts of the world."