

Advisor

Volume 6 Number 1

Winter/2002

Spotlight on: Human Rights after September 11

Human Rights after September 11

Q & A with Michael Posner, Executive Director



In the weeks after the September 11th attacks, many people who had not paid much attention to Afghanistan or that region of the world asked: "Why do they hate us so much?"

In retrospect, it is striking to see how insular and removed we are, how protected from global conflict, and the kinds of political violence that are a routine feature of life for so many people around the world. Because we're so physically isolated from most of those conflicts, it was a real shock for us to realize that there's a complicated world out there with lots of inequities, and that a lot of people blame us for those problems. The question "why do they hate us" – and the media coverage that focused on this – reflects our effort to answer at the most basic level "what does this all mean?"

Our media and certainly our government do not really talk about the extent of inequity in the world and the level of frustration and anger that exists. The lack of that information in our schools and our news has contributed to our insularity, which in turn, further fuels the anger and frustration of those suffering elsewhere. There's a whole generation of people in the world who are young, poor, disenfranchised, illiterate, and without much reason for hope. In the world we live in today, their misery, poverty, and disaffection oceans away can and does still affect us.

Now that we are more aware of the underlying causes, what can we do?

While military responses will at times be necessary, it is not enough to use the military to fight terrorism; we must also be engaged in concurrent development for better conditions in the countries where terrorism is bred. Simply dropping bombs on caves will not achieve our long-term goals of a secure and stable world; we need to build institutions – internationally and in individual societies – that are accountable to citizens and to the global community.

The rule of law and due process are vital to peace and stability, yet they are absent from far too many human endeavors. Police forces have to be trained in effective law enforcement, but also must respect the rights of the citizens they protect. Economic production has gone global; so too must global labor rights for the workers the world economy employs. Refugees have to be assured protection when they flee persecuting governments. Perpetrators of the most heinous international crimes have to be held accountable for their actions. And there have to be international consequences for rulers who repress their own citizens and flaunt the rule of law.

But those are only a few of the problems we see in the headlines everyday. The big-picture view that's missing, the headline we haven't seen nearly enough of, is that

Afghanistan is only the most dramatic example of a country with conditions that breed the kind of threats we have so tragically seen come to reality. There are a lot of places – Indonesia, Somalia, Turkey, Colombia, the Philippines – with the same dangerous ingredients. The question is how can those places build and become rights-respecting states? That's really what we in the human rights community are in business to do: Advancing human rights is a central part of a long-term vision for global peace, freedom, and security.

Is there a formula for building rights-respecting societies?

There's no formula, of course, but in the last two decades, the idea of advancing human rights has fundamentally changed the way countries operate. Around the world, there is more of an embrace of universal standards, philosophies and values – largely because of a number of charismatic, dedicated individuals who, in their own national struggles, have put these elements on the table. There's also been a changing of the guard in many places, as governments who committed serious human rights violations have been

Continued on page 2 >



"Advancing human rights is a central part of a long-term vision for global peace, freedom and security."

LCHR Human Rights Defenders Initiative

After a ten-month leave, Neil Hicks has returned to the Lawyers Committee to direct our Human Rights Defenders Initiative, the project that extends a life-line to frontline human rights defenders when they come under attack. The project also works to hold accountable those who persecute advocates for undertaking human rights work.



Neil is currently laying the groundwork to intensify our Defenders work in places where the political space for

human rights advocacy is most limited and under the greatest threat – in particular in the Middle East, Central Asia, and Southern Africa.

An example of the type of case Neil and his team will focus on in this expanded program is that of Dr. Saad Eddin Ibrahim, a prominent university professor and democracy campaigner who was imprisoned in June 2000. Ibrahim's case vividly demonstrates the vulnerability of human rights defenders in Egypt. His conviction on politically motivated charges has had a chilling effect on independent NGOs there. Ibrahim was released from prison in February 2002,

when Egypt's highest appeals court ordered a new trial.

Neil is especially well suited to lead this project: he is an expert on the Middle East and an Arabic speaker with extensive contacts in the region. Prior to joining the Lawyers Committee, where he has been for ten years, Neil worked with Amnesty International in London. Neil spent his leave as a Senior Fellow in the Jennings Randolph Fellowship Program of the United States Institute of Peace in Washington, D.C., where he wrote the forthcoming book, *The Crisis of Human Rights Implementation in the Middle East*. ■

Dr. Saad Eddin Ibrahim was arrested, tried, convicted, and sentenced to seven years of hard labor for "receiving foreign funding without permission."

The International Criminal Court: From Idea to Reality

The world is on the verge of an historic milestone: the establishment of an International Criminal Court (ICC) at The Hague that will prosecute individuals who commit genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.

The Court will become a reality when 60 nations ratify the Rome Statute – the treaty

that created the ICC. At press time, the total number of countries to ratify the treaty was 55. With just five ratifications to go, the Rome Statute is likely to enter into force in mid- to late- 2002.

Since negotiations about an ICC began a decade ago, the Lawyers Committee has played a leading role in defining how such a court would function. We have been a vocal participant at major U.N. negotiations devoted to determining the composition of the Court, as well as the Rules of Procedure and Evidence, and

Elements of Crimes. In addition, we advocate on behalf of the ICC in Washington, urging the U.S. government to play a constructive role in the ICC process and opposing legislative initiatives that seek to undermine the ICC.

Our work in 2002 will focus on making sure the Court is ready to function when it comes into existence, and educating the public and the media about how the Court will function and why it is an essential part of the emerging system of international justice. ■

Posner Q+A, continued from page 1

replaced by those who opposed their regimes and made human rights a central element of their demands and vision for a better society.

This is my hope for Afghanistan, and it is possible. When I began working at the Lawyers Committee 23 years ago, Nelson Mandela and Vaclav Havel were in jail, and

generally persecuted by the repressive regimes in their countries. Needless to say, these are two of the greatest statesmen of the last century – and their approach to governing was very much a product of their experience as human rights advocates.

Human rights have become, for many political leaders, not simply something to

pay lip service to, but a core value of their leadership. The key is to do everything we can to support the Havel and Mandelas of tomorrow: to work with advocates in places where human rights rhetoric is still viewed as subversive, and to help build not only leaders, but the institutions that will sustain their work and commitment. ■

Lawyers Committee in the News

The articles below are just a sampling of recent media coverage where the Lawyers Committee has provided information and expertise. Our media advocacy work since September 11th has focused on issues ranging from the Guantanamo Bay detainees and the military commissions

created by Presidential Order, to refugee resettlement and the detention of non-citizens.

In all our outreach efforts, we work to be constructive and results-oriented. In some cases, our work with the media has contributed to the positive outcomes of

policy decisions. In other cases, our media statements and outreach helped shape the tone and content of coverage.

To read the Lawyers Committee's media statements on these and other issues, visit our web site at www.lchr.org. ■



SPOTLIGHT ON THE BOARD

The Lawyers Committee's Board of Directors is a dynamic group. Many of our colleagues have been in the news lately:

Kenneth Feinberg was appointed by U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft as the Special Master of the September 11 Victims' Fund. Ken is overseeing the equitable distribution of fund money.

Daniel Doctoroff was named Deputy Mayor for Economic Development and Rebuilding by New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg. As a city official, Dan has been required to sever formal ties with all organizations, and has stepped down from our board.

Harold Hongju Koh, the former Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human

Rights and Labor in the Clinton Administration, is our newest Board member. Recently, he has been an expert voice on military tribunals and other justice issues. Harold also has resumed teaching at Yale University Law School.

Sigourney Weaver was until recently starring in *The Guys* with Bill Murray at the Flea Theater. Anne Nelson, wife of Lawyers Committee staffer George Black, wrote this play in response to the September 11th tragedy. A conversation at our Annual Human Rights Award Dinner between Anne and Jim Simpson, artistic director of The Flea (and

Sigourney Weaver's husband), was the catalyst for this collaboration.

On a final note, Board Chair **William Zabel**, President **Tom Bernstein**, and board members **Craig Cogut** and **Daniel Doctoroff**, co-chaired our 2001 Annual Human Rights Award Dinner in October. The dinner honored three courageous human rights advocates – **Salma Sobhan**, **Francisco de Roux**, and **Amchok Thubten Gyamtso** – and raised more than \$1.2 million for the Lawyers Committee. Board members **Kerry Kennedy Cuomo** and **Sigourney Weaver** both took part in honoring the three advocates. ■

How to Give to the Lawyers Committee Spotlight: Estate Planning

If you are considering giving to the Lawyers Committee through your estate plans, one of the most cost-effective ways to support our work is to name the organization as a beneficiary of your retirement plan. This is a cost-effective gift because of the tax benefits.

When retirement plans – such as pension funds, 401ks and IRAs – are left to an individual (other than a spouse) upon your death, the proceeds are subject to two taxes: an income tax and an estate

tax. Combined, the two taxes could erode up to 80 percent of the remaining benefits. If left as a gift to the Lawyers Committee, the funds escape all taxes. The assets in the plan would be removed from your taxable estate, and the Lawyers Committee would receive 100 percent of the remaining benefit.

To find out more, contact the administrator of your retirement plan, or call **John Weis** at the Lawyers Committee: **212-845-5267**.

Annual Summer Event at Ellis Island

The Lawyers Committee for Human Rights will host its annual Summer Associate Event at Ellis Island on **Tuesday, June 18, 2002**. The event introduces our Asylum Representation Program and highlights *pro bono* opportunities. After a brief presentation, law firm associates can tour the museum and talk with Lawyers Committee volunteers and asylum clients during the cocktail reception. Contact **Veronica Koo** at **(212) 845-5212** or **koov@lchr.org** for information.



New York Headquarters:
333 Seventh Ave.
13th Floor
New York, NY 10001-5004

Telephone (212) 845-5200
Facsimile (212) 845-5299

www.lchr.org

Washington DC office:
100 Maryland Avenue, N.E.
Suite 500
Washington, DC 20002-5625

Telephone (202) 547-5692
Facsimile (202) 543-5999

Board of Directors

Chair, William D. Zabel
President, Tom A. Bernstein
Chair Emeritus, Marvin E. Frankel

Staff Directors

Executive Director, Michael Posner
Finance & Administration, John Foran
Human Resources, Kathy Jones
Washington, DC, Elisa Massimino
Communications, Jill Savitt
Development, Anne Travers

PRESORTED
FIRST CLASS MAIL
U.S. POSTAGE

PAID

NEW YORK, N.Y.
PERMIT NO. 3833