



A People-Shaped World



Human Rights Must Include Equity for Women, Says Speaker Ginwala

During the months of feverish preparation leading up to South Africa's first democratic elections, a dedicated professional woman took home a computer disk one evening to put in a few more hours' work.

In the small hours of the night, she opened the document, clicked on Search and Replace, and changed the course of history.

The document was a draft of South Africa's new constitution. The woman was Frene Ginwala, the only female member of the committee drafting the constitutional legislation. What she replaced was the word "he" with "she".

Her deft stroke was a victory for women's equality. Since that time, the constitution has explicitly mentioned both women and men.

The change may seem small, but Ginwala believes it was highly significant. "Women are often subsumed in something else, and therefore they get lost," she said.

"I believe law ought to be a way of liberating people," added Ginwala, who holds a law degree from London University, England. "The way you frame it is what will make that difference."

Anticipating Change

Ginwala has helped shape history not only by being in the right place, not just at but *before* the right time.

A South African of Indian descent, Ginwala joined the African National Congress at a time when it was outlawed by the apartheid regime.

She spent 30 years in political exile, assisting some of the ANC's top leaders to escape from South Africa, and advocating for an end to apartheid. Later, she played an active role in negotiations between the apartheid

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"The study of human rights is a field of great moral dimension, and a very fertile field for scholarship and instruction."

Philip E. Austin, President
University of Connecticut

Learning From Others

A Comparative Approach to Human Rights

The Inaugural Lecture of the UNESCO Chair in Comparative Human Rights

As a nation comprised mostly of immigrants and their descendants, there are compelling reasons for the United States to engage in human rights issues, says Amii Omara-Otunnu.

Speaking during his inaugural lecture as UNESCO Chair in Comparative Human Rights at the University of Connecticut on April 30, Omara-Otunnu said "Our history as a country is intertwined with the history of human rights around the world, and this is a

powerful reason for us to study and promote the cause of human rights."

The experiences of waves of immigrants who fled persecution in their own countries, of the Native Americans who suffered at the hands of the newcomers, and of the African Americans who were brought against their will and were for years deprived of human rights, are all part of the American heritage, said Omara-Otunnu, a history professor. "Of all the nations in the world, we ought to be able to

identify with people undergoing various forms of oppression."

In his lecture, "The Challenge of Human Rights in The 21st Century: An Ecumenical Approach," Omara-Otunnu said the work of every UNESCO Chairholder is guided by the vision and principles outlined in UNESCO's Constitution. As an agency of the United Nations, which was founded in the aftermath of World War II, UNESCO seeks to foster peace, security and the

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University of Connecticut

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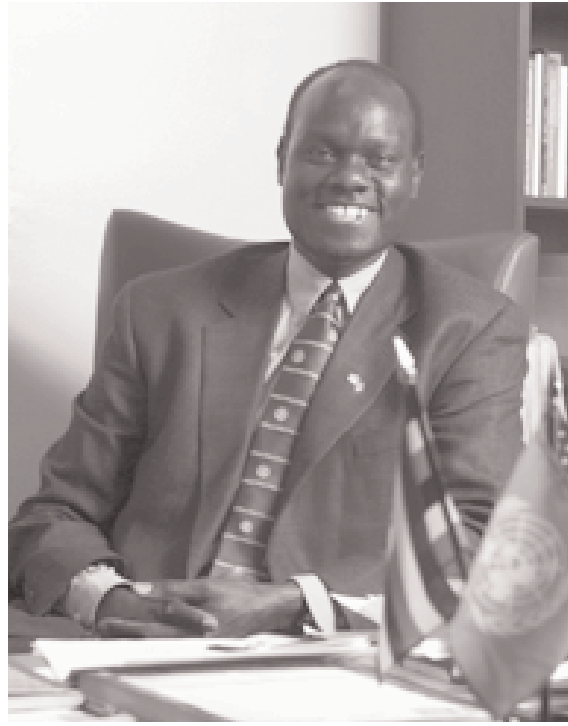
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A Message from the UNESCO Chair

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes the rule of law as the best means to facilitate the realization of human rights.

The document was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in the period after World War II – a war that pitted against each other forces that sought to organize the world according to the principle of “racial” superiority and those ostensibly determined to ensure that the world would function on the basis of the rule of law.

Yet although the Declaration unequivocally asserted the virtue of the rule of law, it did not clarify the guiding principles that should anchor it. Thus, although the triumph against fascism and Nazism largely discredited the doctrine of “racial” superiority, it did not eradicate



Amii Omara-Otunnu

discrimination on the grounds of skin pigmentation. Indeed, in many societies, the “rule of law” was used to justify and to enshrine inequalities between different “racial” or ethnic groups and to perpetuate not justice, but injustice and unearned privileges.

This issue of the Bulletin focuses on the rule of law for two main reasons: First, because the law and the rule of law play multifaceted functions in molding behavior and in ordering societies. And secondly, because the UNESCO Chair & Institute of Comparative Human Rights are committed to promoting values that sustain the democratic rule of law. We hold that if the rule of law is to facilitate the realization of human rights, it must be

“... it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law.”

Preamble to the
Universal Declaration

informed by the principle of fair and equal treatment of individuals and groups.

Historically, the term “people” has been qualified by various parties and for various reasons – to mean “white

people”, for example, or to refer only to men. This has undermined the principle of equal treatment and presented a fundamental problem in the realization of human rights for all.

The centerpiece of the Bulletin covers a conference organized by the UNESCO Chair & Institute of Comparative Human Rights at the University of Connecticut in conjunction with the University of Richmond, Virginia. The speakers, by sharing their first-hand recollections of the struggles for human rights in which they

participated, explored the role played by lawyers in the parallel and interrelated struggles for racial equality in the United States and South Africa.

Two other articles focus on prominent South African lawyers Frene Ginwala and George Bizos, highlighting the roles played by two principled advocates for human rights during the apartheid and post-apartheid periods.

The stories are threaded together by common themes. Advocates at the forefront of human rights struggles worked – and continue to work – in societies pervaded by racism and sexism that are often buttressed by laws. They demonstrated outstanding commitment to helping others and building a better future, and their patience and persistence over time has contributed to significant improvements in the lot of the disempowered, even as much remains to be done.

The article on the UNESCO Chair’s inaugural lecture summarizes the historical context, philosophical bases, and practical realities that make commitment to the realization of human rights an imperative for the individual and collective welfare of humanity. The piece is complemented by an account of the biennial conference of UNESCO Chairs in Human Rights. Both speak to the interdependent nature of our world and to the need to build networks of reciprocal solidarity for the cause of human rights.

And finally, the article focusing on the Student Ambassadors for Human Rights program emphasizes our commitment to young people, who have a significant role to play as agents of positive change in the effort to build a viable culture of human rights.

I hope that as you read the various articles you will be inspired by the message and by the achievements of these role models for human rights. Please let us know what you think.

The International Criminal Court Treaty came into force on July 1, after the required 66 countries ratified the Rome Statute, with many more poised to do so. The international court, to be based in the Hague, will have authority to try persons accused of genocide, crimes against humanity, and serious war crimes. The United States of America has withdrawn its 1998 signature from the statute, however, and will not be subject to the Court’s jurisdiction.



Globalization’s impact on Africa appears to be more detrimental than beneficial. The World Bank and Britain’s Department for International Development have acknowledged that globalization may have exacerbated Sub-Saharan Africa’s problems. Recent data show that more than one-third of the region’s children are malnourished, 40 percent have no access to primary education, and school enrollment rates are falling. In addition to the ill effects of the “structural adjustment program”, onerous external debts, internal wars, droughts, and famine have severely jeopardized Sub-Saharan Africa’s prospects.



A recent UN report found that in the past 30 years there has been a 70 percent destruction of the natural world, mass extinction of species, and the collapse of human society in many countries. The report, Global Environmental Outlook, charts the environmental degradation of the past three decades and anticipates how the world might look 30 years from now. It suggests that by 2032, most of the world will be afflicted by water shortages, with severe problems suffered by 95 percent of the population in the Middle East and 65 percent of people in the rest of Asia and the Pacific.

SAVE THE DATE

Third Annual Comparative Human Rights Conference

Effective **Approaches** to the
Realization of Human Rights

October 22, 2002

9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

South Campus, Rome Ballroom
University of Connecticut, Storrs

For more information, contact:

(860) 486-0647 or e-mail: unescochair@uconn.edu



Mainstreaming Human Rights

UNESCO Chairs Develop A Joint Agenda

UNESCO Human Rights Chairs from around the world gathered in Stadtschlaining, Austria, from April 24 to 27, to share information and develop priorities for their work.

Pierre Sane, UNESCO assistant director-general for social and human sciences, said human rights must be “mainstreamed” into policy in various parts of the world. He said the UNESCO Human Rights Chairs have an important role to play in advising and influencing United Nations agencies, governments, non-governmental organizations and others in a positive way.

Sane noted that human rights is about human behavior. The research conducted by the Chairs therefore must not be esoteric, he said, but should be sufficiently practical to change behavior. To accomplish this, the Chairholders need to develop a research agenda that emphasizes a global approach to human rights; capacity building between institutions; and strategies to humanize the globalization process that is taking place. Dissemination of research results also is essential.

He said the work of the Chairs must be cognizant of the specific social, economic and cultural context underlying human rights issues. Are there security issues, for example, that have prompted censorship and placed restrictions on freedom of speech?

He encouraged the Chairs to facilitate collaboration on specific human rights issues, such as migrant workers, the impact of housing shortages on society, and the economic and social effects of food shortages.

In all their work, he said, the Chairholders should involve a cross-section of stakeholders, such as NGOs. They also should focus on collecting reliable data that can help in policy formulation, and should incorporate information about best practices into the training of policy makers, including elected officials, and professionals working in the community, such as police.



Left to right, Pierre Sane, assistant director-general, Social and Human Sciences, UNESCO, Amii Omara-Otunnu, UNESCO Chair in Comparative Human Rights in the United States, Vladimir Volodin, chief of the Section for Human Rights and Development, UNESCO.

“It was very helpful to meet and hear people from headquarters outline their priorities,” said Omara-Otunnu, UNESCO Chair in Comparative Human Rights in the United States, “and it was good to have the opportunity to offer input.”

Vladimir Volodin, chief of the Section for Human Rights and Development, addressed organizational strategies to develop greater cohesiveness among UNESCO Human Rights Chairs and their work. He

divided the 50 or so Chairs into six regions, based on geography and language. The groups will meet in the coming months to develop human rights themes and approaches appropriate to each region.

The conference was also an occasion for the Chairs to share ideas with each other and build bonds. Each Chairholder presented a report on his or her work, and there were opportunities for informal discussion.

Omara-Otunnu, who was attending the UNESCO Chairs biennial conference for the first time, said mutual sharing of information and networking were valuable aspects of the four-day event.

“It was fascinating to hear what other Chairs have managed to achieve and the obstacles they have had to overcome,” he said.

“The mandate for all of us is to educate about human rights, but in the Third World, many Chairs don’t have access to resources such as computers and the Internet that have become indispensable educational tools elsewhere,” Omara-Otunnu said.

“There are different kinds of disparities in the philosophical context in which we must provide education,” he continued. “In the Third World, people are very passionate about human rights. In the United States, it’s the opposite. People think they know all about it and that it isn’t an issue they need to be involved in.”

Many of the Chairs face acute daily challenges, such as conditions of insecurity and a lack of water, he added. “In the United States, we know peace is important but we take it for granted.”

The conference resulted in the passing of a Declaration on the Contribution of UNESCO Chairs to the Promotion of Human Rights, Democracy, Peace and Tolerance.

In addition to regional follow-up discussions, some of the Chairholders will represent the Human Rights Chairs at a forum for UNESCO Chairs of various specialties in Paris in November.



Learning From Others

A Comparative Approach to Human Rights

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observance of human rights by inculcating the values of a common humanity through education and training.

Despite the idealism at the time the UN was founded, some of the world leaders who were party to its development did not believe in the humanity of all people, he said.

Jan Smuts, for example, then Prime Minister of South Africa, wrote an inspiring preamble to the UN Charter, yet his government was denying the rights of the majority of South African people. “By ‘people’ they meant only white people,” noted Omara-Otunnu.

Similarly, in the history of American constitutional writing, African Americans were once identified as three-fifths human beings. “It was remarkable logic,” he commented, “but that is the history we’re dealing with.”

Today, however, the shared humanity of all human beings has been established scientifically, he noted. The Human Genome Project

showed conclusively that all human beings belong to the same species.

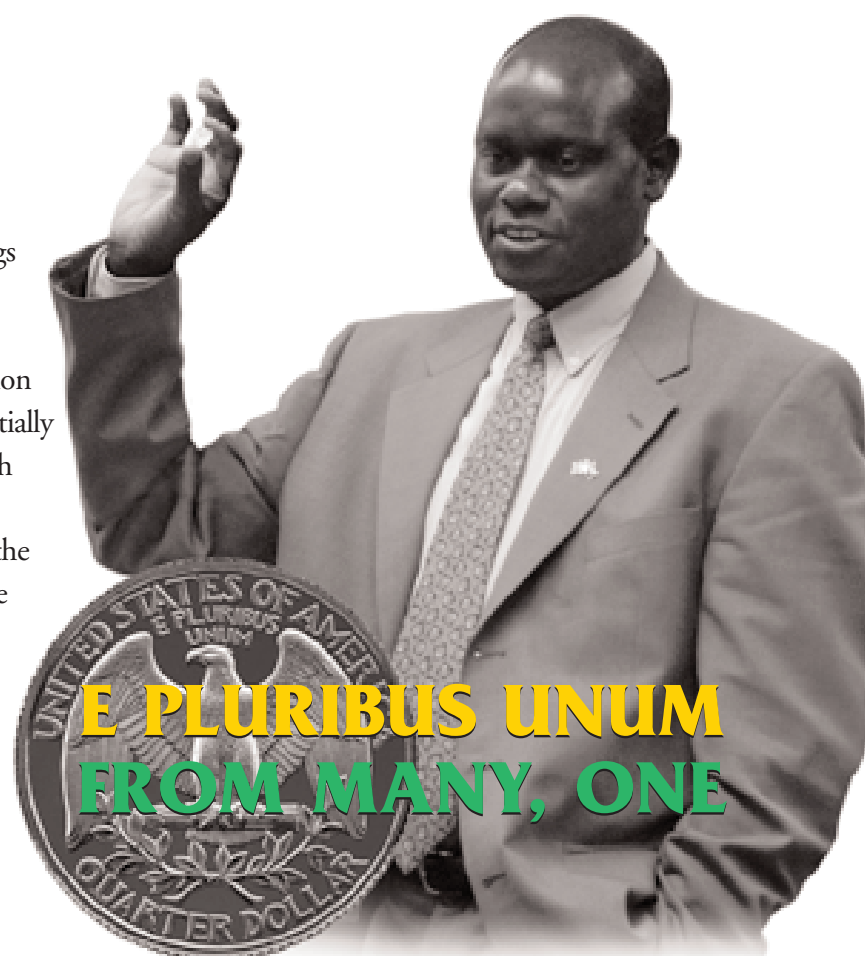
In addition, he said, the remarkable speed of modern travel and communication has made the term “global village” substantially a reality. And the economic welfare of rich and poor countries is inextricably linked.

Effective human rights strategies for the 21st century must take into account these facts, he said.

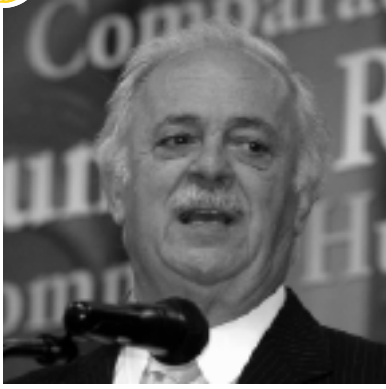
Omara-Otunnu said he has developed an inclusive approach, which he terms “comparative human rights,” that seeks to integrate experiences and perspectives from around the world and promote the human rights of all people.

He said the term “human rights” has been used to mean many different things, yet it should not be difficult to understand: “There are two operative words,” he said, “‘human’ and

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Holding up a coin with the words “E pluribus unum”, Amii Omara-Otunnu points out that the Latin motto is a reminder that America is a nation of people from many different backgrounds. With this history, Americans should be particularly sensitive to human rights issues, he says.



George Bizos



Wycliffe Mlungisi Tsotsi



Oliver Hill Sr.

The Ties That Bind

Law and Human Rights in the U.S., South Africa

A lawyer is either a social engineer or a parasite on society, the American civil rights lawyer

Charles Hamilton

Houston once said.

A half-day conference on “Human Rights and the Question of Race: Reflections from South Africa and the United States” at the University of Connecticut on April 30 was an opportunity to hear from a half-dozen lawyers who chose to be social engineers.

Two panels of prominent human rights and civil rights lawyers from South Africa and the United States reflected on the parallels between race and racism and law and lawyers in the two countries.

“There are ties that bind black Africans in South Africa and African Americans,” said Dumisa Ntsebeza, former head of the investigative unit of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, now the first distinguished visiting professor with the Institute of Comparative Human Rights.

“Much of what is said about the struggle for human rights in South Africa can be said about the struggle for civil rights in America: it



In both South Africa and the United States, the security forces that should have upheld people's human rights often violated them, as shown in this 1963 photo from Birmingham, Alabama. In each country, a small group of principled lawyers used the courts to challenge the system.

involved the struggle for basic rights and freedoms. And in both countries, progressive lawyers made a major impact in the development of constitutional rights for black people,” he said.

George Bizos, a veteran South African human rights lawyer, said the United States had a significant influence on the struggle in South Africa. “We as lawyers followed the example of many of your lawyers and what they were doing, especially in the 1950s.”

He said the year 1948 was full of irony for many South Africans: while the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was being debated in the United Nations, the National Party – Nazi sympathizers – became the

government of South Africa. The regime officially instituted apartheid, a policy that separated people according to race and denied basic freedoms and democratic rights to the non-white majority.

“While your lawyers were preparing *Brown v. Board of Education* [the U.S. Supreme Court case against segregated schools], we took the opposite direction,” he said.

In 1953, the apartheid regime introduced the Bantu Education Act, legislation denying African people in South Africa an education that would enable them to aspire to more than menial work.

Bizos drew other parallels with the United States, likening the bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, in

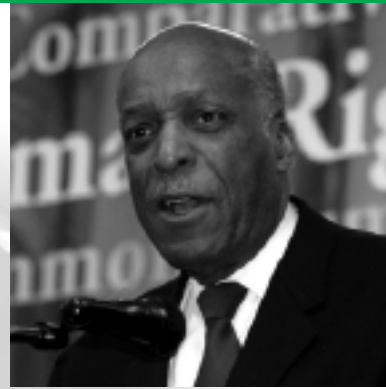
1955-56 to the defiance campaign in South Africa in 1952-53, during which thousands were imprisoned for peacefully refusing to obey unjust apartheid laws.

The legal system was full of paradoxes, however, and that opened up opportunities for lawyers concerned about injustice to exploit loopholes, he said.

“South Africa was a totalitarian state for the vast majority of people of South Africa, the indigenous people. But the few million whites were democratic for themselves – ourselves,” said Bizos, who is white. “They wanted an independent judiciary, due process, and – if a loved one died – an inquest to determine whether anyone was at



Clement Temba Sangoni



Nathaniel Jones

ind

uth Africa

fault. There was a small group of lawyers, both black and white, that said ‘we must take advantage of this space given to us.’”

Over time it became clear that the anti-apartheid movement and black South Africans would not be destroyed. Mandela became a symbol that “you cannot put down the human spirit,” Bizos said.

Octogenarian attorney Wycliffe Mlungisi Tsotsi, an outspoken opponent of apartheid who served as president of the All African Convention, a political umbrella group, in the 1940s, also demonstrated the resilience of the human spirit when he ran afoul of the authorities.

“Escape, arrest, detention, deportation – I have experienced all of these in my long fight for democracy and human rights in South Africa,” Tsotsi said.

He was forced into exile, but made secret trips to South Africa and, in 1964, was arrested and jailed. Although his detention was “the bitterest experience” of his life, Tsotsi’s spirit remained undaunted. He proved to be a difficult prisoner, refusing to eat the food he was offered and convincing a guard to smuggle newspapers to him.

Clement Temba Sangoni was another of the small group of black lawyers in South Africa during apartheid. An attorney since 1976, Sangoni founded a legal firm that took on many political cases. At one point, his was the largest black law firm in South Africa. Yet, like other

lawyers who stood up against the regime, he was frequently targeted for the work he was doing.

“Our offices were broken into time and again and security files would be missing,” he said.

Although South Africa’s new constitution is now building a culture premised on human rights, Sangoni noted that “the history of our struggle is a long one, that began long before apartheid.”

Oliver Hill, a longtime civil rights lawyer in Virginia, observed that the civil rights struggle in America also goes back a very long way. The civil rights movement is generally traced to the 1960s or 1950s, said Hill, who is best known for his role in the *Brown v. Board of Education*, the landmark Supreme Court decision that ended the policy of segregated schools.

Yet the struggle began in the 17th century, he said. When, for example, three indentured servants – an Irishman, a Scotsman and an African – escaped and were captured, the two white men were put in the stocks, the black man was given 50 lashes. “From that period on to the present day, punishment for negroes for doing the same thing a white criminal did is much greater, and we’ve got to do something

about that,” he said.

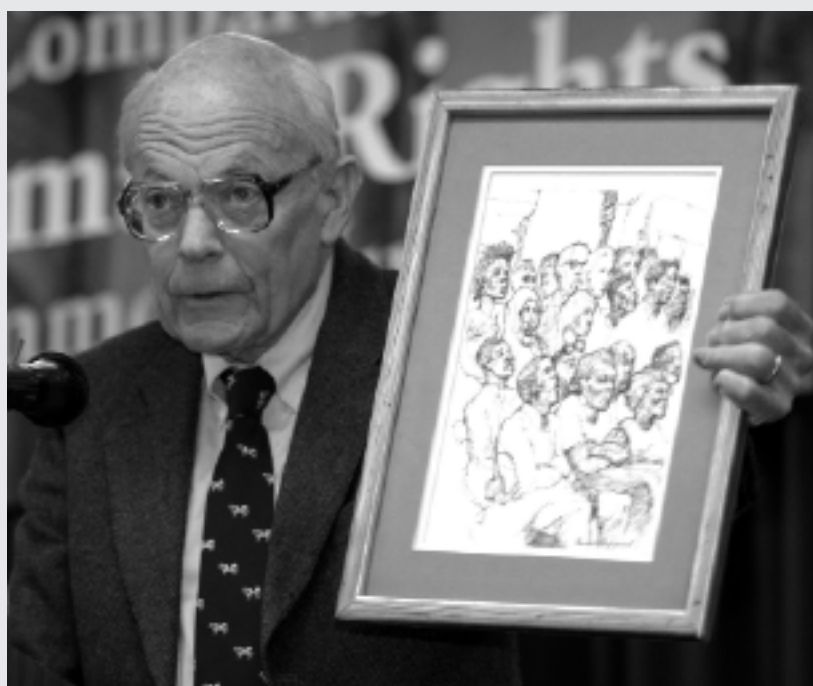
“We talk about our great Constitution, and it was a great Constitution, but it was flawed,” said Hill.

Nathaniel Jones, an African American Appeal Court judge for the Sixth Circuit, said much of his work as general counsel for the NAACP during the 1970s focused on trying to implement the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which guarantees equal protection for all under the law.

During the 1980s, he observed several treason trials in South Africa. He was struck by “how much the lawyers and jurists there knew about our history. I was encouraged to know that lessons from the American civil rights struggle were being imported into legal decisions in the struggle in South Africa.”

Yet in the United States, there has been a backlash against the civil rights movement that began after Ronald Reagan became president.

“That has created a restraint on the implementation of civil rights,” Jones said. “Unless we can revive a sensitive judiciary, the faith people have in the law will be diminished and we’ll be coming to South Africa to ask for advice.”



Louis Pollak, a judge of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, holds up a courtroom sketch of the Steve Biko inquest in South Africa, which he attended as an observer in 1977. During a Comparative Human Rights conference at UConn 25 years later, he presented the sketch to George Bizos, counsel to the Biko family.

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‘rights’. And what entitles us to human rights is the simple and profound fact that we are human beings.”

Although human rights are not given by states, many states have taken them away, Omara-Otunnu noted: “Every society has had violations of human rights and every society has come up with a mechanism to make sure human rights are not violated.” There is much to be learned from the experiences of others, he said: “It is the interchange of experiences, views and ideas with a view to developing mutual understanding, that I term ‘reciprocal learning.’”

Reciprocal learning is called for not only between, but within societies, Omara-Otunnu added. “Human rights abuses thrive in situations where the victims are dehumanized, so that the oppressors see no need to try to understand the perspective of the oppressed. Yet lasting solutions to human conflicts must take into account the interests of all those involved.”

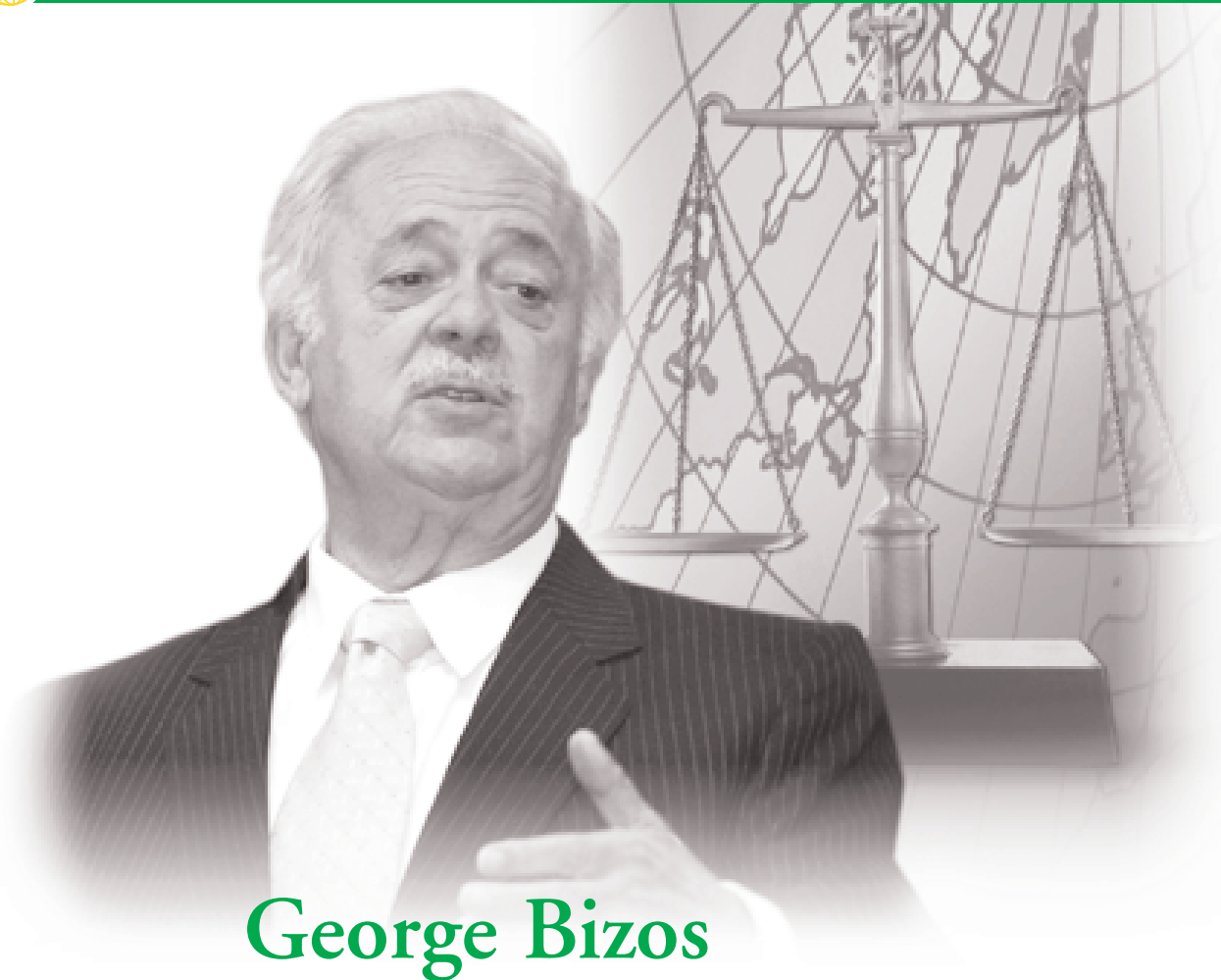
Omara-Otunnu said the need for an ecumenical approach is underscored by history. He cited international opposition to the Trans-Atlantic slave trade; the mobilization of forces from around the world against Nazism and fascism during World War II; and the joining of hands among black people and white people and pressure from the international community that helped the American civil rights movement and South Africa’s anti-apartheid struggle succeed.

He said the UNESCO Chair at UConn chose South Africa to anchor its comparative human rights approach, both because of the country’s historic human rights struggle, and because of its commitment to human rights in the post-apartheid era.

In the early 20th century, South Africa’s African National Congress political party was one of the first to formulate a vision of a non-racial society; and it was in South Africa that Mahatma Gandhi formulated his philosophy of non-violence, a philosophy that was later emulated by Martin Luther King Jr. during the civil rights struggle in the United States.

Still, said Omara-Otunnu, “it is one thing for leaders to articulate a vision in opposition, and another thing to follow up on that vision when in power.” After the end of apartheid, South Africa set an example to the rest of the world when the African National Congress-led government adopted a national policy of reconciliation and truth.

Omara-Otunnu said this emphasis on putting ideals into practice will also characterize the activities of the UNESCO Chair. The Chair will work with universities around the world, and with specific local communities and professional organizations, to combine grounding in theoretical scholarship with practical engagement in human rights-related activities.



George Bizos

Seeking Justice in an Unjust System

Veteran advocate and human rights activist George Bizos is a distinguished South African lawyer, who has committed his professional career to the pursuit of justice, even in a system that was inherently unjust.

That commitment ensured his participation in numerous political cases during the apartheid era. It earned for him a role in helping to shape the new constitution. And it underlies his current pursuit of litigation relating to housing, health, and education to ensure that the economic and social rights now promised in the constitution become a reality for all.

DEFYING THE SYSTEM

Bizos began his career as a law student at the University of the Witwatersrand. At that time, just 5 percent of the students were Africans, one of whom was Nelson Mandela.

Although classes were not segregated, the rest of university life was, and the experience had a profound impact on Bizos.

After graduating in 1950, he began to undertake political trials, one of an informal group of attorneys doing so. Most were white, but the group also included black lawyers such as Mandela and Oliver Tambo, leaders of the African National Congress party.

These lawyers demonstrated that there were many aspects of the system to which they did not subscribe. They refused to call black people in the witness box by their first name, for example; and Bizos defied the law that precluded black lawyers from occupying premises in white areas by inviting colleague Duma Nokwe to share his office.

Among the first people Bizos defended were

teachers trying to educate black children. As a result of the infamous Bantu Education Act, many of the best schools for black students were closed. Some dedicated teachers then established clubs where they would teach children under the guise of “cultural activities”. But the ploy was soon discovered and the teachers taken to court.

Bizos and his colleagues also defended some of the black people who, during the Defiance Campaign, rode buses intended only for whites or went in hundreds of thousands through whites-only entrances. And they acted on behalf of people arrested for failing to carry a pass as obliged by law.

HIGHER STAKES

Over the years, the work assumed a higher profile. Bizos was part of the defense team at the Rivonia Trial in 1963-4, as a result of which Mandela was sentenced to life imprisonment and served 27 years in jail. Despite the onerous sentence, Bizos was relieved that it wasn't even worse:

“There may be success even in a conviction, if you have avoided the death penalty and if the trial was successfully used as a forum to advocate the justice of your cause.”

Bizos began visiting Mandela regularly in prison. Although their conversations were taped, they developed a means to communicate.

“The primary thing political prisoners wanted to know,” says Bizos, “was how the movement

was doing. They would write ‘movement’ and signal a question. ‘She’s fine,’ I would reply, ‘lots of relatives are coming to see her’ – meaning that the movement was flourishing.”

HOLDING ON TO HOPE

Bizos says the authorities were hostile to his work. He received a message from Prime Minister John Vorster that his “rope was getting short”; and twice was denied a passport.

But when he felt discouraged, he says, his clients’ optimism buoyed him: “I never heard one of them curse their lot. They fervently believed in the justice of their cause.”

After the 1976 uprising in Soweto, when schoolchildren protesting inferior education for blacks were shot down by government forces, he defended many young people.

And in 1977, Bizos was invited to represent the family of activist Steve Biko, who was killed in detention. He was stunned by the inquest’s egregious miscarriage of justice. “Irrespective of the evidence, the justice system exonerated the murderers and torturers,” he says. “Yet the world jury convicted them.”

The attention garnered by Biko’s and other inquests had an unintended side-effect, however. “The exposure of some of the atrocities in detention without trial probably helped the formation of hit squads,” notes Bizos. “The government thought if they could make people disappear, they wouldn’t have to have inquests. That was one of the most unfortunate byproducts of the legal process. But you can’t say ‘I’ll keep quiet about atrocities.’”

In a repressive system, he says, “the courtroom was the final forum in which you claimed the moral high ground.”

SHAPING THE FUTURE

When the negotiations began that would bring apartheid to an end, Bizos was invited to brief Mandela on governance practices in other countries. And in the early 1990s, he participated in drafting the new constitution, contributing to discussions such as whether to have an executive or ceremonial president, and whether the electoral system would be based on “first-past-the-post” or proportional representation.

On the eve of the adoption of the interim constitution, the negotiating parties finally agreed to establish a process of truth and reconciliation that included a controversial provision for conditional amnesty.

Despite reservations about amnesty, Bizos applauds the truth and reconciliation process, which he describes as a form of trial. “If you’re able to talk about the past, the situation is less likely to go over to violence,” he says. “For all the criticisms, there has not been a single act of revenge, despite the admission by more than 7,000 people that they committed horrendous violations of human rights.

“I don’t believe reconciliation is an instant affair,” says Bizos, now a lawyer with the Legal Resources Centre, “but I think good foundations have been built for that reconciliation to take place.”

Mind *and* Heart

Armed with knowledge from the classroom, a group of University of Connecticut students have entered the battlefield to win the war on human rights issues.

Their weapons are passion, energy, and a strong desire to tackle obstacles to the realization of human rights for all.

“We have seemingly insurmountable problems in the world and if I can put a small dent in the problem by helping someone realize that a Muslim wearing a hijab, or a Puerto Rican neighbor, or a Black co-worker all have similarities, then the world might be made better for all of us,” says Flor Taina Amaro.

Amaro, who recently graduated and plans a career in social work, has been wearing the hat of Student Ambassador for Human Rights.

She is one of nearly two dozen students who participated in a novel program that applies a semester-long international human rights course to front-line, hands-on experience.

While the struggle is a global one, the students have embarked locally on their mission to educate others, especially their peers and middle and high school students, about human rights issues.

The student ambassador program was forged in the classroom of history professor Amii Omara-Otunnu, who holds the UNESCO Chair in Comparative Human Rights at the University of Connecticut. Topics he addressed in the class included major historical events, such as the French Revolution and World War II.

“Practice without theory is insufficient,” says Omara-Otunnu.

“In order to be effective, you need an understanding of history. It’s not sufficient to have moral outrage. By knowing history, we realize that we’re not inventing anything – people have already gone through this.”

His classroom examples of human rights activists included Nelson Mandela, South Africa’s first black president; Mahatma Gandhi, who led India to independence through a strategy of nonviolence; Frantz Fanon, who left his practice as a doctor in World War II to fight with the French resistance in Africa; America’s civil rights leader, Martin Luther King Jr.; and U.S. Sen. Robert F. Kennedy, who had the courage to speak out against apartheid to South Africa’s parliament.

Chancellor John D. Petersen says the program is an example of the University’s commitment to human rights. “We are making human rights education part of our permanent culture,” he says.

Omara-Otunnu says the involvement of young adults in the human rights arena is the best way to effect positive change in society: **“Once they’re well grounded in the ideals and philosophy of human rights, young people are in an excellent position to cultivate a culture of human rights in their communities, with their peers, and in schools.”**

Student ambassador Christopher Hattayer has embraced this concept.

“We’ve transformed the study of human rights from theory into practice,” says Hattayer, who along

with the other ambassadors launched an action plan that included a survey of peers, a video, posters, and an introductory presentation designed for teenagers.

The survey revealed that many American college students do not understand what human rights is about, says another

student ambassador, Michael Hoerger, who is pursuing graduate studies in history with a concentration in human rights.

The survey also showed that hardly any of the students questioned



Student ambassadors Flor Taina Amaro, foreground, and Jennifer Infante

Students as Ambassadors for Human Rights

had heard of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Omara-Otunnu says the results demonstrate how much work there is to be done: “In the United States, we think we stand for human rights, but we don’t know some of the most fundamental instruments of human rights,” he says.

The student ambassadors hope a grassroots educational campaign will lead to a better understanding.

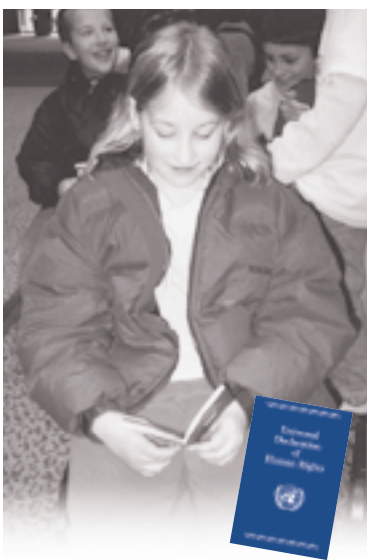
On May 2, in collaboration with the University’s theater and art departments, they portrayed various human rights concerns in a dramatic presentation. With the support of corporate sponsors, some 200 local elementary and middle school students attended the event, which aimed to inform and entertain the young audience. The occasion was organized by Lorna Gonsalves, former associate executive director and director of global outreach at the Institute of Comparative Human Rights, who played a key role in preparing the students to become ambassadors.

On other occasions, student ambassadors gave an introductory talk on human rights directly to schools in Massachusetts, Connecticut and New Jersey.

“Our presentation to high school students is interactive and it gives students a chance to discuss things,” says student ambassador Jennifer Infante, who hopes to become a high school history teacher. “When we give them different scenarios of human rights violations, the students come up with some brilliant responses.”

Some of the student ambassadors are interested in specific areas of human rights. Ada Gonzalez, for example, who is taking a minor in human rights, is concerned about the rights of minority youths incarcerated for drug offenses.

The students have ambitious plans for future activities. “In the future we may be putting on workshops for government officials,” says Hoerger. “It’s something to look forward to and it’s nice to have such faith put in us.”



Elisabeth Pittman, 9, reads the Universal Declaration, given to her by a student ambassador at UConn.

A People-Shaped World

continued from cover

government and the opposition.

She now represents the ANC, the majority party, as a Member of Parliament and is serving her second term as Speaker, the first woman to hold the position in South Africa.

In 1999, she and her colleagues selected the University of Connecticut for a collaboration with the African National Congress. The UConn-ANC Partnership comprises archival work, oral history, and a comparative human rights program out of which the UNESCO Chair and Institute of Comparative Human Rights developed.

In recognition of her human rights work, the University awarded her an honorary Doctor of Laws degree in May. During her visit, she addressed graduating students, and discussed human rights and gender issues with a group of women leaders.



Speaker Ginwala, top center, listens to President Thabo Mbeki deliver his State of the Nation address, during the Opening of Parliament in Cape Town, South Africa, in February 2001.

Defining the Agenda

True equality for women lies in the implementation of rights for all people, Ginwala said, not in realizing women's rights as a special category of rights.

"The society into which we go is a society shaped by men, for men," she said. "We've

focused as women on entry to that society and the discrimination that prevents us from doing so. But that approach means it's an acceptable society."

Instead, said Ginwala, "we need to reshape society. Let's make it a people-shaped world."

Ginwala said in the 1970s, the growing feminism in the West prompted South African women to re-examine their approach to apartheid. The subordination of women was written into apartheid law.

During the 1980s, as it became increasingly apparent that apartheid could not be sustained, Ginwala and other South African women began studying the experiences of other countries.

"We said the liberation of the country wouldn't be complete till women were fully emancipated," she said.

Women insisted on being part of the process of developing a new constitution. They assembled a group known as the National Coalition of Women, that cut across party, racial and religious lines. Anticipating that their detractors would dismiss them as educated urban women, "stirring up" otherwise contented poor, uneducated, rural

women, the coalition began consulting women on two basic questions: "What does it mean to be a woman in South Africa?" and "What about your life do you want changed?"

Through interviews, focus groups and workshops, and posting sheets of paper outside supermarkets for women to write their answers on, they reached more than 800,000 women.

The resulting Women's Self-Defined Agenda for Change summed up the issues of

greatest concern to women, including the rights of single parents, the rights of women to custody of children in divorce, and – for white women – property rights.

Equipped with this information, the women's advocates became a force to be reckoned with in the negotiations.



Frene Ginwala speaks with President Philip E. Austin during the University of Connecticut graduation ceremony in May.

Significant Gains

In the constitution that emerged, women have made major gains.

Parliament has taken a lead. Women now comprise 38 percent of Cabinet members; three of Parliament's four presiding officers are women; and the defense, health, and welfare committees are all headed by women. In addition, a day care has been established to accommodate MPs' young children.

"The constitution says we don't discriminate," said Ginwala. "That doesn't mean simply not excluding people; it means when they walk through the door, we have to create conditions where they can function."

There is also a policy that any parliamentary delegation must include women.

The emphasis on women benefits everyone, Ginwala said. "Decisions at all levels of society are informed by different experiences, as well as by technical knowledge. If some perspectives are left out, the result will be bad policy decisions."

A parliamentary committee has been set up to conduct a gender analysis of the budget and to monitor the impact of policy on women.

Evaluating what happens is critical, noted Ginwala, for, although the law is important in framing a just society, exercising rights is a different matter.

Under the new constitution, a woman has the right to divorce her husband, for example. Yet without an independent source of income, that right may not be meaningful, she said.

Achieving equity for women, Ginwala said, requires "a change of mindset. And it has to begin with women."

South Africa's first woman Speaker knows – better than most – that it's not an easy road. "You'll be ostracized," she said, "but eventually the hassle factor pays off."

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