
Letter from the Editors

HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS, ACADEMICS, and practitioners have always faced obstacles in their work; such is the nature of the field. What is new, however, is the gradual attack, and persistent erosion, of the language of human rights; countries that, at least in their rhetoric, once spoke of human rights and the rule of law, now seek to undermine the legal instruments they fought to create. The lasting effects of this remain to be seen.

These and other issues were addressed by the International Commission of Jurists Eminent Jurists Panel on *Terrorism, Counter-terrorism, and Human Rights* at its U.S. hearings, held at American University Washington College of Law. Meeting on the eve of the fifth anniversary of the September 11th attacks, the Panel raised critical questions about the Bush Administration's tactics in waging the "war on terror," and the effect of these on human rights. Many of the issues raised concerned the legal scope of presidential power, a topic closely linked to the proliferation in the U.S. of presidential signing statements. By including two articles on these subjects, the *Human Rights Brief* aims to invite debate and to critically assess the long-term impact of these policies on human rights.

In a series of articles published last year, the *Human Rights Brief* considered the broad international implications of social and economic rights. An article by Richard J. Goldstone analyzed a South African constitutional claim to the right to housing in *Government of the RSA v. Grootboom*. Consideration of the right to housing in South Africa continues in this issue in an article by Lilian Chenwi that examines the recent decision of the High Court of South Africa, *City of Johannesburg v. Rand Properties*.

The Israeli incursion in Lebanon this past summer brought home the reality and the limitations of international humanitarian law. With more than 1000 civilian casualties, and the continued threat of unexploded munitions (most notably, Israeli cluster bombs), the debate continues on how the human rights community should respond. Victor Kattan's article provides another perspective on this contentious issue.

Finally, in a precedent-setting opinion, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights recognized the affirmative duty of States Parties to uphold a higher standard of care for vulnerable people including, in particular, those with mental disabilities. Featured in the *Brief*, this progressive decision highlights the continued growth of the human rights community and the protections available under a system bounded by the rule of law. *HRB*

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