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## Alumni Profile

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## ALUMNI PROFILE



ROBERT GUITTEAU, JR., a 1993 graduate of the Washington College of Law (WCL) and former Executive Director of the Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law (Center), ascribes his early interest in human rights to his close friendship with a family that could not return to Argentina during late seventies because of political persecution. This experience inspired him to become involved with human rights work through the Council for Human Rights in Latin America, a local human rights organization based in Oregon. While working with the organization, he met numerous victims of human rights abuses in the Americas, whom he admired for their ability to maintain human dignity in the face of political persecution and personal pain. At the Council for Human Rights he co-authored and directed the passage of human rights resolutions in the Oregon state legislature and at state and regional labor federations, while also working with church groups. He also organized visits between Latin Americans and local legislators in an effort to advance a dialogue about international human rights. Later, as a research assistant at the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, D.C., Guitteau followed the legal, diplomatic, and legislative developments of the *Letelier-Moffitt* assassination case (a historic case of state-sponsored terrorism). In the course of his work with these organizations, Guitteau began to appreciate the extent to which human rights violations require a legal response in addition to a policy response.

Guitteau's work led to his decision to attend WCL, where he began to work with the Center as a student. He assisted in the coordination of conferences that assessed the 1993 Vienna Declaration on Human Rights, the current applicability of Nuremberg Principles, and the inter-American system for the protection of human rights. He also researched for the amicus to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights on the incompatibility of Uruguay's and Argentina's "amnesty" laws with the American Declaration on Human Rights.

Guitteau continued his work at the Center after graduation, promoting human rights education as the Executive Director. From 1994 to 2001, he was responsible for the development, implementation, and administration of international legal education and research grants. He also oversaw the Inter-American Digest Project and the War Crimes Research Project and directed the Inter-American Human Rights Moot Court Competition (Moot Court). As Director of the Moot Court, Guitteau worked annually with more than 90 attorneys from international institutions, 60 universities, and numerous international development agencies, including USAID missions in Honduras, Nicaragua, Dominican Republic, Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Peru, to promote and support local human rights initiatives.

During his time at WCL, Guitteau also took part in a program to develop human rights legal education training sessions in Mexico, Colombia, and Argentina. The program specifically trained members of the academic community, members of non-governmental organizations, and ombudsmen. The resulting partnerships established the *Red Académica de Derechos Humanos*, under the leadership of Diego Rodríguez and Claudia Martín, which continues to enhance local capacity in human rights training and education through technology, experience, and professional contacts.

In addition to directing the Center, Guitteau continued international legal work at Aguado and Associates,

where he specialized in immigration litigation, particularly as a pro bono attorney representing asylum claims for clients from the Americas. From 1997 to 2000, he held an associate professor position at WCL, teaching an L.L.M. course on American legal institutions designed to prepare lawyers from other countries for practice in U.S. firms.

Guitteau's current position with Management Sciences for Development (MSD) is an expansion of his firm commitment to policy development in the field of human rights and international human rights law. As the Chief of Party for the MSD, a USAID-funded human rights initiative, Guitteau manages a staff of more than 30 people and a \$30 million budget. MSD implements The Human Rights Program in Colombia (Program), which is aimed at addressing the human rights crisis existing at various levels of Colombian society. Guitteau described the Program as one of the largest human rights projects ever undertaken by USAID, which works with government, state, and civil society initiatives.

The Program is guided by three main components: prevention of human rights abuses, protection of human rights workers, and response to human rights abuses. The program's preventative measures are attempts to avoid massacres and forced displacements of the civilian populations through early warning and response. The Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman (Ombudsman), a state institution with a constitutional mandate to protect the rights of Colombians, coordinates the Early Warning System. This system is designed to detect the risk of human rights abuses to the civilian population at a local, regional, and national level. The Ombudsman also works closely with other state programs to organize the response to imminent threats.

The second part of the program focuses on protecting human rights workers and their organizations, as well as individuals and groups under threat for their political beliefs, human rights activities, or member-

ship in an ethnic minority. The program provides Colombian human rights workers with "hard" protection, such as metal detectors and bulletproof vests, as well as "soft" protection in the form of communication links, emergency assistance, and transportation services.

Guitteau has continued to support work in human rights education. He has developed, among other initiatives, a national human rights moot court competition that has attracted the participation of more than 35 Colombian universities in the two years of its existence. He explained that his greatest satisfaction is working with Colombian professionals who have cultivated their understanding of human rights through participation in the WCL Inter-American Moot Court Competition or in the national competition. The depth of their commitment and understanding of human rights issues has led them to work as professors, legal counsel at leading human rights NGOs and state institutions, and to support the local human rights network. Guitteau believes one of the most important functions of the Program is to help public officials use international human rights approaches in their work.

Guitteau remembers his choice to attend WCL was directly related to the quality of professors and courses in the area of human rights. As a student, Guitteau recognized the "entrepreneurial" atmosphere of the law school and the administration's willingness to consider proposals advanced by students devoted to human rights issues. Guitteau's clinical experience allowed him to bridge the gap between theory and coursework, providing him with an opportunity to work with Professor Richard Wilson on issues surrounding indigenous rights in Colombia. He also recalls late nights working with numerous J.D. and LL.M students to develop *The Human Rights Brief*, the first student-run publication designed to showcase the analytical capacity of WCL students and to bring practical application of legal theory to international human rights concerns.