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NGO Update

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NGO UPDATE

To foster communication between human rights organizations around the world, each issue of the Human Rights Brief features "NGO Update." This space was created to aid non-governmental organizations (NGOs) by informing others about their programs, successes, and challenges. For information on how to submit updates for your organization, please see the instructions provided at the end of the article.

THE CENTER FOR JUSTICE AND INTERNATIONAL LAW (CEJIL)

www.cejil.org

On September 19-21, 2001, CEJIL held a seminar on how to promote compliance with decisions handed down by the Inter-American Court and Commission of Human Rights. Various state and federal judges from Central and South America, human rights NGO representatives, and leading officials from the Inter-American Court and Commission attended the event. During the seminar, the participants discussed various compliance issues and signed a resolution recognizing the importance of member states' compliance with the American Convention on Human Rights (American Convention) in light of the contemporary reality where many states fail to meet this goal. The participants identified as particularly troublesome the reluctance by member states to investigate human rights abuses and punish offenders. The resolution aims to pressure states to bring their national legislation closer to human rights principles enshrined in the American Convention. It also urges states to comply with the recommendations and decisions of the Inter-American Human Rights bodies and monitor their implementation.

AGIR ENSEMBLE POUR LES DROITS DE L'HOMME (WORKING TOGETHER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS)

www.aedh.org

Agir Ensemble Pour les Droits de l'Homme (Agir Ensemble) is a French NGO that has consultative status with the United Nations. The organization provides human rights groups in various countries with long-term financial and material support and technical assistance. Since its creation in 1989, *Agir Ensemble* has assisted nearly 200 organizations worldwide.

Agir Ensemble is currently supporting various grassroots NGOs in Western and Central Africa. These partner associations provide legal assis-

tance to human rights victims, lobby in local governments on their behalf, and train grassroots activists. Training has become an important aspect of the organization's activity, since the number of people actively involved in human rights activities at the grassroots level on the African continent has steadily declined over the last few years. The training program seeks to provide participants with the tools and skills necessary to establish and manage human rights projects adapted to their respective country or region. While *Agir Ensemble* coordinates the program, local partner organizations implement the program with the input and participation from local resident members.

After partnering with organizations in Western and Central Africa to conduct an evaluation of local human rights conditions, *Agir Ensemble* developed a human rights training program for young people. The program raises awareness among young people of human rights issues, and encourages them to take an active part in furthering human rights where they live.

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES (HDI)

www.electroniccommunity.org/HDI/windows.htm

HDI is a Nigerian NGO that raises and promotes economic and social rights issues in Nigeria, in particular those that affect women. HDI is currently addressing the ills of widowhood practices by organizing training sessions, workshops and seminars, and commemorative events. On July 28-31, 2003, HDI held its yearly empowerment programs for women entitled, "Life Skills and Cottage Industry Training for Women and Widows." This year's program focused on giving women practical knowledge on the use and preparation of household necessities such as cosmetics, confectionaries, soap, and *adire*, a locally produced tie and dye design. To further facilitate women's self-dependence, the project offered micro-credit loans for new women's projects. On September 25, 2003, HDI held a seminar entitled, "Proposals for the Administrative and Judicial Reform of the Probate Registry and a Law on the Administration of Estates." The seminar sought ways to modernize the Nigerian justice system by reforming elements of probate and estate laws that discriminate against women. In October 2003, HDI will host a "Widows' Day

Celebration" to increase the visibility of this extremely marginalized group in society.

THE LAWYER'S COMMITTEE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

www.lchr.org

The Lawyer's Committee for Human Rights has announced its intention to change its name to Human Rights First, beginning October 24, 2003. Michael Posner, LCHR's Executive Director, explained that the change was intended to build on the base of support the organization has traditionally enjoyed from members of the legal profession. "We want to involve academics, doctors, students and others in the struggle to apply human rights principles around the world," said Posner in a recent statement on the change. Human Rights First will continue much of the work that the Lawyer's Committee of Human Rights was well-known for, including its asylum representation program, which matches pro-bono attorneys with indigent refugees seeking asylum.

LCHR published a recent report, "Assessing the New Normal," which finds that changes in domestic law and security policy since September 11, 2001 are eroding human rights protections in the United States. The report says that the erosion of human rights is not a temporary result of emergency measures, but rather the result of an unwarranted expansion of executive power and the abandonment of constitutional principles. *HRB*

The Human Rights Brief is accepting submissions for the next edition of "NGO Update." If your organization has an event or situation it would like to publicize, please send a short description to hrbrief@wcl.american.edu, and include "NGO Update" in the subject heading of the message. Please limit your submission to two paragraphs. The Human Rights Brief reserves the right to edit for content and space limitations.