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## Alumnus Profile: William Clark Harrell

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tions about the role of women in society. Our Clinics make a contribution to society by defending the disadvantaged while, at the same time, educating students. Our international program attracts over 150 lawyers from all over the world and prepares them for work in business, human rights, environmental law and international organizations. Our scholarship continues to defy barriers and sets out to break down man-made distinctions.

We are not here to celebrate a past

that is stagnant. One hundred years ago WCL, like all other schools, did not admit black Americans. We cannot celebrate

Nothing could have been more important to the founders than to know that their message was so powerful that it continues to live.

the founders without recognizing the limits placed upon them by the social and legal structure of their time. The founders

could not fully attain equality and diversity. Our mission is to build on the opportunity that the founders established. Nothing could have been more important to the founders than to know that their message was so powerful that it continues to live. With the contribution of the entire WCL community, I am confident that we will continue to represent the values of human dignity for which they stood. ☺

*\* Remarks by Dean Grossman at Founders' Day Reception, April 8, 1996*

## ALUMNUS PROFILE

### Alumnus Litigates Human Rights Violation Before Inter-American Court

by Stephen Jacques

Like many lawyers working in human rights, WCL alumnus William Harrell did not chart his life's course in the direction it has taken him. He originally planned to make a career in domestic civil rights law. After graduating with his J.D. from WCL in 1990, Harrell worked as an attorney for the ACLU on the National Prison Project, a job that was exactly the type he hoped and expected to have after graduation. Yet after a year, he resigned from the ACLU, sold all his material possessions, packed his bags, and moved to Ecuador.

Despite having only a rudimentary knowledge of Spanish, Harrell obtained a job teaching at the Catholic University in Ecuador and another job working for an Ecuadoran international law firm. Doing civil rights work for the firm, Harrell used his expertise in prisoner's rights to begin an investigation of the Ecuadoran penal system. His association with Catholic University provided him with access to the prison system. Harrell's findings have resulted in the recent filing of a case before the Inter-American Court on Human Rights. The case is actually a consolidation of many complaints relating to due process violations in the Ecuadoran penal system.

While investigating Ecuadoran prisons and developing the case, Harrell came in contact with various human rights organizations and professionals. He eventually accepted a position at the Center for Human Rights Legal Action (CHRLA), an NGO permanently based in Guatemala

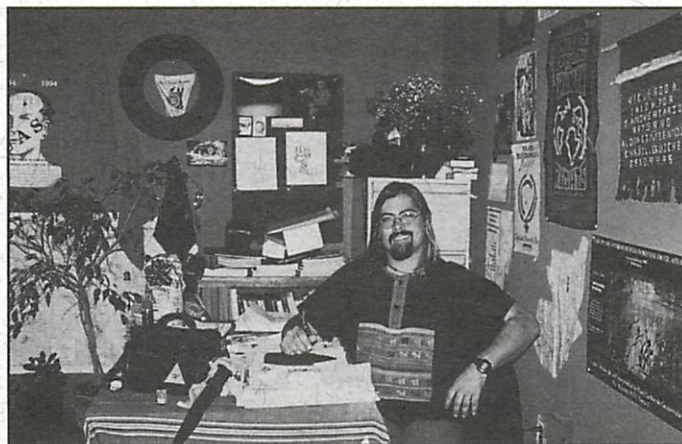
City, but with one branch operating out of Washington, DC. After working in Washington on Guatemalan human rights cases for one year, Harrell became the Center's legal director and moved to Guatemala where he currently works and resides.

Today, Harrell has abandoned his original desire to be a civil rights attorney for the ACLU, and has committed himself to a career in international human rights.

cannot take every case that arises. "It tears the heart to have to choose only certain battles to fight," he says. Yet Harrell was recently back in Washington fighting two of those battles, attempting to obtain land rights and reparations for indigenous communities who were displaced over fifteen years ago. (*See Vol. 3, No. 2, Winter 1996, p. 2, for more information on the Los Cimientos case.*)

In addition to his work with CHRLA, Harrell serves as consultant to the United Nations Human Rights Commission on Guatemalan prison issues. Harrell also is currently developing an international human rights clinic at a Guatemalan university, remaining true to the WCL tradition of public interest advocacy. Harrell plans to stay in Guatemala to consult for the UN and to get the clinic up and running, but he will return to WCL in 1997 to obtain an LL.M., which he hopes will broaden his academic knowledge in the human rights field as well as increase his effectiveness as an activist.

Although he stumbled into international human rights law, Harrell wants to pursue this field and guide others along this fulfilling career path. "As a politically conscious lawyer," he says, "I've learned that what I get in return from the people I struggle for goes beyond material gain and could never be translated into a salary at a law firm. It has changed my whole perspective on the world." ☺



William Harrell at his office in Guatemala City.

With nineteen Guatemalan cases currently before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Harrell has argued a variety of human rights issues, from extrajudicial executions and police or military abuses of force, to relatively undeveloped areas of human rights litigation. "Land rights and the rights of indigenous peoples are critical matters right now in Guatemala, and we find ourselves dealing with them a great deal," he says.

Harrell notes that, as the only organization of its kind in Guatemala, CHRLA

Photo Courtesy of Will Harrell