

# Human Rights Brief

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## Center News

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## CENTER NEWS

On February 26, 2003, the Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law (Center) at the Washington College of Law (WCL) hosted the Honorable Nilmaro Miranda, minister of human rights of Brazil, at WCL. Minister Miranda met with WCL students, administrators, and faculty, and gave an address entitled, "Human Rights in Brazil in the 21st Century." He was accompanied by a delegation of Brazilian dignitaries, including Ambassador Valter Pecly of the Brazilian Mission to the Organization of American States (OAS); Ambassador Hidelbrando Valadares, director general of the Department of Human Rights in Itamaraty; Minister Antônio Carlos Nascimento Pedro, head of the Human Rights Division within the Department of Human Rights in Itamaraty; and Secretary Silvio Albuquerque from the Brazilian Mission to the OAS.

In March, the Center launched the first Indigenous Rights Training Institute (IRTI), co-directed by Center executive director Hadar Harris and Dr. Osvaldo Kreimer, rapporteur of the OAS Working Group on Indigenous Rights and special advisor to the secretary-general of the OAS. The Institute was sponsored by the Inter-American Development Bank, the Open Society Institute, and the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights, and brought together 35 indigenous rights leaders and experts from 14 countries to attend an intensive two-day training session on emerging issues in international law. Participants included attorneys, activists, diplomats, and government officials. The IRTI provided participants with a unique opportunity to learn about cutting-edge international legal issues (including topics such as self-determination, land use, environmental law and sustainability, intellectual property, and human rights) and discuss how these issues relate to indigenous rights. The IRTI included lectures by Dean Claudio Grossman; Santiago Cantón, executive secretary of the Inter-American Commission; Professor Maivan Lam; Professor Marcos Orellano; Professor Durwood Zaelke; Professor Daniel Bradlow; and Professor Peter Jaszi.

The Center and WCL's Program on Law and Government co-sponsored the centerpiece conference of the Washington College of Law Founder's Events, co-chaired by Hadar Harris and Jamin Raskin, WCL professor of constitutional law. The conference, entitled, "International Perspectives on the Right to Vote and Political Democracy in the United States," took place at the Library of Congress on March 20. The conference brought together international experts, legal academics, and civil rights activists to discuss and debate the state of political democracy in the United States. The conference sought the input and comparative expertise of international election experts from the OAS, the UN, and the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. In addition, U.S.-based activists and academics, including Wade Henderson of the Leadership Council for Civil Rights, Harvard Professor Alan Keyssar, Michael Maurer of the Sentencing Project, and Tim Cooper from Democracy First, attended the conference.

This semester, the Center selected its first Student Advisory Board, a highly qualified and committed group of students who will assist in developing programming, creating infrastructure, and promoting the Center's activities. Student Advisory Board members have a wealth of experience in the fields of human rights and humanitarian law. They have lived and worked in countries as diverse as Brazil, Turkmenistan, Guatemala, and Zimbabwe, and they have worked for national and international nongovernmental organizations. The Center's Student Advisory Board members for 2003 are David Baluarte, Julia Graff, Sarah Hymowitz, Jamal Jafari, Christine Louise Lin, Chai Shenoy, and R. Michael Waller.

The Munching on Human Rights series, which the Center launched last semester, continued with programs by Professor Claudia Martin, "A Road Map to the Regional Human Rights Systems," and Professor Paul Williams, "International Law and Peacemaking: Stories from the Field." The Munching on Human Rights series is a monthly lunch and learn non-credit introductory course on human rights and humanitarian law for students without an international law background. The series was instituted this year and has had an overwhelming response, with over 100 students attending each session.

Additionally, the Center sponsored an interactive discussion with returned Peace Corps volunteers who debated whether the Peace Corps and similar programs positively affect international development or promote American cultural imperialism. First-year WCL students Kat Fotovat (Moldova), Sarah Hymowitz (Turkmenistan), Jey Jeyalingam (Benin), Roger Phillips (Togo), and Stephanie Richards (Ukraine), shared their experiences and insights.

From May 18–23, 2003 the Center will sponsor the Eighth Annual Inter-American Human Rights Moot Court Competition. Forty-five teams from around the world will convene at WCL for the only trilingual (English-Spanish-Portuguese) moot court competition based on the inter-American human rights system. The competition includes presentations of written memorials and oral arguments based on a hypothetical case, seminars on human rights law, and activities with governmental and international nongovernmental organizations located in Washington, D.C. This year's hypothetical is a compelling case involving the derogation of rights under a state of emergency declared by a democratically elected government facing intense political and economic pressures. The competition is open to students enrolled in a juris doctor degree program or its equivalent. For more information about the Inter-American Human Rights Moot Court Competition, see [www.wcl.american.edu/humright/mcourt](http://www.wcl.american.edu/humright/mcourt). ☉

