

MISCELLANEOUS

AN INSTITUTION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

The International Institute of Human Rights *(Strasbourg, France)*

Relatively recent events have demonstrated, if there were still any need, the importance of human rights information and education. It is primarily up to individual citizens to defend their rights, that is, to claim the protection to which they are entitled under national and international instruments guaranteeing their fundamental rights and freedoms. However, even in democratic countries respectful of such rights and freedoms, people are not familiar enough with international instruments. The European Convention on Human Rights itself is perhaps not "used" as often as it might be by European citizens, and one wonders to what extent the disparity in the numbers of individual requests received by the European Commission on Human Rights from citizens of each State party to the Convention is related to differences in levels of awareness as to the possibilities offered by the Convention.

Education concerning international instruments for the protection of human rights is therefore an essential factor for the proper functioning of systems of guarantees, and thus for effective protection. The International Institute of Human Rights has dedicated itself to this task for nearly 20 years, in compliance with the wish of its founder, René Cassin, who was awarded the 1968 Nobel Peace Prize for his contribution to the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and for his constant struggle to ensure international respect for the fundamental rights and freedoms of all citizens.

However, in this field as in others, the task is overwhelming and the workers are few. How can the citizens of all countries be made aware of their rights and freedoms and of the protective measures offered them by the international community? René Cassin devised a slogan which was to become a programme: "training trainers".

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For the past 18 years the International Institute of Human Rights has run courses not only for teachers, future teachers and students but also for

those who in their profession encounter or will encounter questions related to fundamental rights and freedoms, particularly judges, lawyers, diplomats, national and international civil servants and members of human rights associations. The instruction given has evolved considerably over those 18 years, but its spirit and basic organization have remained unchanged. Initially, about 70 participants attended the three-week courses and seminars. In recent years, however, around 300 participants from 60 to 70 countries have attended the sessions, which were rapidly extended to four weeks. Although the instruction is deeply rooted in European traditions and given in close collaboration with the Council of Europe, the European Commission on Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights, it is also, even primarily, intended for non-Europeans, in keeping with the international calling of the Institute. It should be stressed that participants from Western European countries are generally in the minority.

The structure of the courses, held annually in July on premises graciously lent to the Institute by the Strasbourg University Faculty of Law, has evolved over the years along with changing educational requirements. The 1987 session was made up of three main components: introductory lectures, basic courses and lectures on specific themes.

The introductory lectures, delivered in French or English, present the basic problems: the philosophical and anthropological foundations of human rights protection, the universality and historical development of those rights and the structure of the major international protection systems. These lectures take up three hours each morning during the first week.

The basic courses focus in detail on humanitarian law and the principal mechanisms for the protection of human rights. One week is devoted to the United Nations, another to European and the third to American systems. Each course comprises 10 hours of lectures and seminars. Since they provide basic knowledge essential for each participant, parallel sessions are held in English, French and Spanish. The teachers are mainly professional lawyers and include, on a voluntary basis, members of the Registry of the European Court of Human Rights, the Secretariat of the European Commission of Human Rights, the Secretariat of the European Commission of Human Rights and the Secretariat of the Council of Europe. Courses on the American system are taught by judges of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and representatives of the Inter-American Commission. Finally, the International Committee of the Red Cross, in collaboration with the Henry Dunant Institute, provides teaching in humanitarian law for one week of each session.

Since the afternoons of each four-week session are taken up by the basic courses, the lectures on special themes are given in the mornings of the second, third and fourth weeks. These talks are delivered in either French or English. They focus on a different central theme each year. For example, the theme in 1984 was: "Science, technology and human rights"; in 1985 "Human dignity in diversity and international norms against torture"; in 1986: "Responsibility of the State and of individuals for the respect of human rights"; and in 1987: "Human rights in a multicultural world". A series of three to five lectures presents various aspects of the central theme. To ensure a continuous supply of new material, the Institute avoids inviting any instructor more than once to lecture on a specific subject. Thanks to this policy a wide variety of eminent specialists and human rights practitioners have been able to present and develop their ideas in Strasbourg. Opportunities are also provided for meetings between the teachers on the one hand, and between teachers and students on the other. Each week, a round-table discussion is held for all the students and teachers on the course.

Although the Institute sends out about 2,500 copies of its programme (to universities and other educational institutions, teachers, public and private bodies) many participants are drawn to the Institute by its reputation alone. Over 4,000 people throughout the world have so far participated in one or more sessions, and courses have been given by several hundred experts, many of a very high level. This has created a truly international network of friends of the Institute, many of whom continue to maintain close ties with Strasbourg. The Institute's administration is always pleased to invite alumni to return as teachers, and to meet them in international organizations, human rights associations and universities.

A certificate of attendance is delivered to all participants whose presence at the courses and seminars has been regular. However, the Institute's highest distinction, its diploma, is awarded only to those who have demonstrated in-depth knowledge and have a solid legal background. The conditions set for admission to the examinations are so strict that an annual average of only 25 candidates is allowed to take the (written, practical and oral) tests and only six to eight obtain the diploma. Even fewer candidates, an average of one every two to three years, pass *cum laude*. As a result of this stringency, most successful candidates for the diploma may be found a few years later in highly responsible posts in which the knowledge they have acquired in the sphere of international protection of human rights is most useful.

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A large number of each year's participants, about 50 to 60, are university teachers, mainly from law schools. Their ages vary from 24 to 70 years and their levels from teaching assistant to senior professor. Each afternoon, a special seminar is organized by the International Centre for Human Rights Education in Universities (CIEDHU) to give them an opportunity to exchange knowledge and experience of human rights teaching and research. Law faculties rarely teach human rights in one homogeneous course. More often, various aspects of the subject are dealt with in courses on constitutional law, civil rights, criminal law, administrative law, public international law or even social law. Thus the CIEDHU plays an important role by promoting a comprehensive view of this vital field, and particularly by helping teachers who wish to offer a special course on the subject. Naturally, exchanges of information during the seminars bear not only on the subject matter itself, but also on documentation and teaching methods.

In addition to these special seminars for university teachers, held for the fifteenth time in 1987, the Institute offers various groups or institutions the possibility of organizing series of conferences or seminars on special subjects. These are held in the late afternoon, following the five daily classes and lectures in the Institute's own programme. Special courses on the rights of indigenous peoples were given in 1984, and since 1985 the English group *Interrights* has run annual workshops in English for lawyers wishing to become more familiar with the procedural aspects of the international mechanisms for the protection of human rights.

Teaching naturally requires materials. At the beginning of each session, participants receive ample documentation, including summaries of the courses to be taught. Particular mention should be made of works produced especially for the Strasbourg course. A manual on the European Convention on Human Rights and its voluminous case law was prepared by the Deputy Registrar of the European Court of Human Rights, Mr. H. Petzold. The French and English versions of the manual (about 420 pages each) will soon be in their fifth edition and a Spanish translation is under way. The eminent American professors Mrs. Dinah Shelton, Mr. Thomas Buergenthal and Mr. R. Norris compiled a similar manual on the American system of human rights protection (*Protecting Human Rights in the Americas*). Written in English, this work has also been translated into Spanish and is in its second edition. It received an award from the American Bar Association, a distinction which can be taken as reflecting on the Institute's work.

One of the most welcome outgrowths of the Institute's teaching activities is the initiative taken by a group of Strasbourg students to organize an annual law contest, the *René Cassin Competition*, on a theme which,

although imaginary, is very close to reality. Teams of students prepare written and oral arguments and addresses concerning a case of alleged violation of the European Convention on Human Rights. The case is heard by judges from the European Court of Human Rights, as well as by professors and lawyers. The European Court has lent its premises and given its support to the two competitions which have been held, with great success, to date. While four teams participated in the initial competition in 1986, this year's event attracted ten teams from seven different countries. They demonstrated a knowledge of the European Convention and a judicial spirit worthy of much more experienced practitioners.

Imparting knowledge of international systems for human rights protection, stimulating thought and helping to propagate ideas and experience are undoubtedly activities of fundamental importance. They are, however, not enough. The teaching of human rights must not only be extended; it must also be preceded by education in the respect for human rights, so to speak. This cannot be achieved at university level; it must be developed in younger students whose personalities are still being shaped. For this reason, following a number of studies and recommendations, in particular by the Council of Europe, the Institute initiated a programme for teachers from secondary schools and teachers' training colleges. The aim of the week-long course, which has so far been held five times in French and twice in English, is to study the most appropriate teaching methods for instilling in young people awareness of and respect for human rights.

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Another outstanding aspect of the Institute's activities is its Film Festival, which will soon take place for the sixteenth time. In theory aimed at the general public, it actually holds special appeal for the young. During this annual week-long event, about 80 films are shown in cinemas in Strasbourg and several nearby towns. Their common theme is consideration of and respect for human dignity, the very cornerstone of human rights. The prizes awarded have often drawn public attention to little-known but excellent productions. However, the festival's major contribution to the Institute's goals has been to heighten public awareness of human rights in the inevitable cultural diversity of today's societies.

Finally, with regard to research, an essential complement to teaching, the Institute has served mainly as a means of organizing collective reflection on specific themes. Several dozen seminars have been held since 1969 to discuss human rights problems in relation to changing ideas and attitudes and, occasionally, in relation to certain events. The major themes

dealt with in recent years include human rights and the environment, freedom of religion, economic and social rights in western democracies, racial discrimination and indigenous peoples, the problems associated with the accession of members of the European Community to the European Convention on Human Rights, illegal foreign workers, the concept of "peoples rights", the right to emigrate, human rights education, etc.

The case law handed down by the European Court of Human Rights was the special subject of a seminar, organized jointly by the Strasbourg University Faculty of Law and the Council of Europe, on the application by French courts of the European Convention. This case law was also studied during a short refresher course, which will doubtless be followed by others, for French-speaking lawyers wishing to study the possibilities for the defence of rights and freedoms offered under the European Convention. Several of the working papers were published either in the *Human Rights Law Journal*, with which the Institute is associated, or as separate monographs.

These meetings also provided an opportunity for co-operation with many universities and other institutions: the University of Essex, the Hellenic Human Rights Foundation, Santa Clara University in California, the Quebec Commission on the Rights of the Person, Columbia University in New York, etc., and, of course, the Council of Europe—its General Secretariat as well as the bodies created by the European Convention on Human Rights. Too numerous to be listed here, the many personalities and institutions with which the Institute maintains permanent or occasional co-operative relations include, for example, the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights, the International Institute of Humanitarian Law, the University of Zagazig in Egypt, the Jacob Blaustein Institute in New York, the Henry Dunant Institute in Geneva, the Ford Foundation and, of course, the United Nations and UNESCO.

The Institute is a unique, world-renowned centre providing comprehensive instruction each year in international human rights protection with respect to every continent and culture. It will remain true to its vocation, in Europe and worldwide, on behalf of all human beings and appeals to all those who believe in mankind and its future to support it in its work.

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the International Institute
of Human Rights*