

DISSEMINATION IN ACADEMIC CIRCLES

The Jean Pictet Competition

by Christophe Lanord and Michel Deyra

The Jean Pictet International Humanitarian Law Competition was first held in 1989 on the initiative of the French Institute of Humanitarian Law in Clermont-Ferrand. Given its name in honour of the author of the *Principles of International Humanitarian Law* and the *Commentaries* on the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, and with his explicit permission, the Jean Pictet Competition continues in the tradition of the major international competitions for law students (Jessup, Rousseau, Cassin, etc.). This French-language competition has attracted more than 500 participants since its inception: universities in Albania, Argentina, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Colombia, France, Germany, Mali, Romania, Switzerland, Tunisia and the United Kingdom have sent representatives of more than 30 different nationalities. The only international competition in a branch of public international law that is too often neglected by academics, its method and objectives endow it with a number of special features.

1. The method

The Jean Pictet Competition enables graduate students of law to become better acquainted with international humanitarian law, using simulated events and role-playing based on fictitious situations of armed conflict. Teams of four members must pit their legal knowledge against one another's and test their ability to find solutions to problems in three phases: the qualifying heats (two days), semi-finals and finals.

During the first two days, all the teams are invited to work on four aspects of a case study and to submit their solutions to four juries. In so

doing, the students have to take on the identities of advisers to ministries (defence, justice, etc.), lawyers, jurists, delegates of the ICRC or of a National Red Cross or Red Crescent Society, or rapporteurs to an interministerial committee, a court, military officers, an international or non-governmental organization, etc. The participants are given a different duty for each test, and are thus able to grasp various aspects of humanitarian law.

After the first two days, the six best teams follow up the case study. A single jury chooses the teams that will go through to the finals. Subjected for the last time to eight hours of preparation, the teams now come face to face. The finals jury selects the winning team, whose members are awarded the first prize: a two-week research fellowship at the Henry Dunant Institute in Geneva. The best speaker is awarded the Gilbert Apollis Prize.

The juries are made up of eminent experts in international law: in 1995 alone, such prominent figures as Mohammed Bedjaoui, President of the International Court of Justice; Anne Petitpierre, member of the ICRC Executive Board; Olivier Russbach, President of the French association *International Law 90*; and Professors Katia Boustany, Pierre Bringuier, Jean-Pierre Quéneudec, William Schabbas, Brigitte Stern and Dominique Turpin were members of the juries. They played their roles consummately, which meant, where necessary, pretending to completely misunderstand the candidates' explanations, or refusing to accept them, simply because the role played by the jury required them to adopt that attitude.

A last special feature of the Jean Pictet Competition is that it is held in a different place each year: the first session was in Clermont-Ferrand (1989). That was followed by sessions in Montpellier (1990), Geneva (1991), Brussels (1992), Clermont-Ferrand (1993), Montreal and Quebec (1994). In 1995, it was the French Red Cross that organized the seventh session in Paris, with great success, following in the tradition of four successive years of involvement by National Red Cross Societies.

The itinerant nature of the competition means that a local organizing committee can be relied on each year to deal with various practical matters (accommodation, meals, transport, reservation of the work rooms, and so forth). The academic aspect of the competition is dealt with by the Committee for the Jean Pictet Competition (CCJP), an association that brings together, in addition to the co-authors of the present text, jurists, lawyers and teachers of various nationalities, many of whom have ties with the French Institute of Humanitarian Law and the Quebec Institute of Humanitarian Law. It is the CCJP that supervises the competition, selecting the host body, devising the case studies and arranging the composition of the juries.

2. The objectives

The Jean Pictet Competition was created primarily to remedy the shortcomings of various university systems, which too often neglect international humanitarian law. It is now possible to promote the study and dissemination of this law by contacting several hundred universities across the world each year to encourage them to register for the competition; by changing the country for each new session, thus attracting the attention of different media and academics each year; and by arranging, in conjunction with the competition, university seminars, lectures and discussions, workshops, and exhibitions on international humanitarian law.

Dissemination is also facilitated by the method peculiar to the Jean Pictet Competition: unlike the other law competitions, no written dissertation is required; furthermore, the case study is revealed to the teams only on the day of the test. This unknown factor obliges the teams to prepare themselves not only in the field of international humanitarian law as a whole, but also in those of international penal law, international human rights law, international refugee law, United Nations law, etc. Thus, in the weeks leading up to the competition, the participants cannot afford to neglect any of these areas.

But over and above the traditional aim of spreading knowledge of the given subject, the real objective of the competition is to convey the reality of international law. The idea is to avoid giving the students too theoretical a view of humanitarian law, but instead to show its limits and constraints. This training work also implies a refusal to take the easy way out, which would be to settle for the media-style view of humanitarian law, one that is unfortunately too common nowadays and is often reflected in statements made by politicians. Not to despise humanitarian law, not to idealize it, but to know its true value: that is the attitude that the organizers expect of the participants.

That is why the Jean Pictet Competition is different from the other international law competitions. Like humanitarian law itself, it does not deal mainly with legal disputes or judicial matters, but with practice and, indeed, with real-life situations.

During the 1994 session, for example, the candidates played the role of ICRC delegates making a first visit to the authorities of a State not recognized by the international community. Faced with a military junta that was more interested in receiving aid than in possible protection activities, the candidates had to devise a whole negotiation strategy and couch their legal arguments in more general terms, with the aim of getting

the other side to accept those arguments. The candidates had to try to persuade the members of the junta to comply with humanitarian law, while knowing that they had expressed (very clearly) their refusal to listen to legal explanations. In such a case, which recalls certain passages in *Warrior without weapons*, what should be done?

To be able to adopt the appropriate behaviour, legal knowledge is essential. Without it, nothing is possible — but legal knowledge alone is not sufficient. Imagination and a lively mind must supplement academic knowledge. And, each year, the organizers meet, among the dozens of very able students, outstanding individuals; not just humanitarian law experts, but also students whose human qualities are on a par with their humanitarian commitment.

For many students, the competition is a complete break with the university world and very often constitutes their first confrontation with the reality of international law. Many students admit to having suffered a genuine “culture shock” when they discovered aspects of which they had previously been unaware. In particular, exposure to the actual consequences of a legal opinion is often a new experience: the realization that a particular opinion, although perfectly well-founded, can have far-reaching consequences for thousands of people must prompt reflection on the ethical aspects of the opinion. The responsibility of the jurist is one of the points on which the organizers of the competition want to prompt participants to reflect.

Another objective of the competition is to foster student encounters with other cultures. First, the case studies lend themselves to such discovery. For a week, the participants live through the tragic events of a fictitious region, since the various tests in a given year all refer to a single situation: the “Underwind Islands”, “Seraikraia” or “Saffividistan”, to cite only the three last years. The candidates must therefore steep themselves in the local culture and the history of these fictitious regions, voluminous descriptions of which are given to them a few weeks before the tests.

The diversity of the students’ nationalities also encourages cultural exchanges. The fact that they have pored over the same problems for a week, have experienced the same joys and the same pains, and have participated in the same unique experience as part of their university training creates very strong links between the participants, links that are the stronger for often being built up across frontiers.

Finally — and it is hardly surprising — vocations are often born of participation in the competition. Many former participants today occupy responsible posts in the humanitarian field, both inside and outside the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and also in public

administration, and legal practices. If any of the 500 former participants is one day confronted with questions linked to humanitarian law or to the Movement, it is very likely that the earlier exposure to these issues will enable him or her to defend the interests of humanity all the better. And that, when all is said and done, is surely the ultimate aim of dissemination.

3. The eighth session of the competition: Geneva, March 1996

The next session of the competition will take place in Geneva from 2 to 10 March 1996. There will be two major innovations compared with previous years. First, the number of teams will be limited to twelve with, in principle, a maximum of three teams from the same country. The teams will be selected not only for their competence in humanitarian law, as before, but also for their motivation and the quality of their humanitarian commitment. And second, participants will be given two days training prior to the competition. The training will not relate to humanitarian law itself, since participants are supposed to have an in-depth knowledge of international law before they even reach the venue of the competition. Topics of current importance, including developments in humanitarian law since the 26th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, will be covered by experts. Similarly, people who actually work with humanitarian law will explain their views on the subject: for example, a legal adviser to the armed forces, an ICRC field delegate, and a legal adviser of a National Red Cross or Red Crescent Society. Finally, workshops will be run that are intended to awaken candidates to the realities of humanitarian action and to improve the way they present their cases and play their roles.

Information on the eighth session of the competition can be obtained from the following addresses:

Mr Michel Deyra
25 rue des Garnaudes
63400 Chamalières
France
Fax: ++33 73 34 36 67

Jean Pictet Competition 1996
P.O. Box 71
1211 Geneva 29
Switzerland
Tel: ++41 22 735 5134
Fax: ++41 22 735 5162

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COMPETITION ROLL OF HONOUR 1989-1995

(the winner is underlined)

- 1989 (Clermont-Ferrand): Free University of Brussels; Fribourg University
Gilbert Apollis Prize: Christian Linsi (Fribourg University)
- 1990 (Montpellier): Aix-Marseille University; Neuchâtel University
Gilbert Apollis Prize: Olivier Raluy (Clermont-Ferrand University)
- 1991 (Geneva): Quebec Bar, Montreal Centre; Free University of Brussels
Gilbert Apollis Prize: Valérie Jochmans (Free University of Brussels)
- 1992 (Brussels): Quebec Bar, Montreal Centre; Aix-en-Provence University
Gilbert Apollis Prize: Daphné Cousineau (Quebec Bar, Montreal Centre)
- 1993 (Clermont-Ferrand): University of Essex; Montreal University
Gilbert Apollis Prize: Catherine Bohémier (Montreal University)
- 1994 (Montreal-Quebec): Saint-Jean Royal Military College (Canada); Paris I University (Panthéon-Sorbonne)
Gilbert Apollis Prize: Stéphane Dubreuil (Sherbrooke University)
- 1995 (Paris) Graduate Institute of International Studies (Geneva); University of Essex
Gilbert Apollis Prize: Alexandre Dalmau (University of Quebec in Montreal)

Christophe Lanord, born in 1967, holds postgraduate degrees in public law, political science and international law from the Universities of Clermont-Ferrand I and Paris II (Panthéon-Assas). He is currently working as a jurist with the Secretariat of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Michel Deyra, born in 1950, holds a doctorate in law and is a lecturer at the University of Auvergne (Clermont-Ferrand). Vice-President of the French Institute of Humanitarian Law, he is a specialist in the law of the European Union and in international humanitarian law.