



## **Celebration of the IBA's Human Rights Institute's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary**

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The Institute of the Human Rights of the International Bar Association was created 25 years ago. It was a moment of great hope. In South Africa apartheid had ended, Nelson Mandela freed from prison, and leading a new South Africa. The Cold War was over, the Soviet Union dissolved, and democracies were burgeoning all over Eastern Europe and Central Asia. The Juntas of Latin America were collapsing too, and in Africa democracy and the rule of Law were on the rise.

The world was full of promise that every man and women just might enjoy freedom. That human rights would be respected. And the role of judges and lawyers, of course, was fundamental to that. As the 20<sup>th</sup> century ended, a peace process brought the troubles in Northern Ireland to resolution. Universal Jurisdiction had brought the case of Pinochet before the courts in Britain. There would be no impunity for dictators who had tortured and killed. As the millennium dawned, it seemed we were entering a whole new era where human rights would at last be on every agenda. The Right to Life, the human yearning for freedom and liberty would be a rallying cry. The freedom to live free from torture, freedom of association and trade unions in your communities, in your colleges. Freedom to protest, freedom of expression, freedom to oppose Government, freedom of thought and belief and religion. Freedom to love and be loved by whoever you chose. The right to liberty only withdrawn after due process in a fair trial. The words on our lips were self-determination, agency and dignity.

But the new century brought events that diminished that hope. It brought international terrorism, war and a resurgence of authoritarianism that has been a creeping reality ever since. Forced disappearances, rendition and torture, the creation of statelessness, extrajudicial killings, the assassination by drones, by poisoning, by beheadings, the use of chemical weapons, abductions, mass rape and gender based violence on a shocking scale, the manifest misogyny and abuse of women and girls, the violent crushing of peaceful protest, racist policing, mass incarceration particularly of black communities, genocide, the return of concentration camps, the attacks by populist authoritarian leaders on Judges, lawyers, journalists, academics and public servants.

The need now is for us to reassert the centrality of law and a respect for human rights. It is vital. And we as lawyers are the guardians of law. We are the people who can make rights a reality. The Human Rights Institute trains lawyers and Judges, intervenes in international court actions, conducts trial observations, leads task forces and creates toolkits to make our work fulfil its objectives.

This is an anniversary to recognise the importance of our existence, made possible by all those lawyers around the world who contribute to the work that we do on human rights at the Institute. And we want to thank all of you. Because of you, the work goes on.