

INTRODUCTION

The Member States of the Organization of American States met in San José, capital of the Republic of Costa Rica, at the Specialized Inter-American Conference on Human Rights held from November 7 to 22, 1969.

The product of this transcendental meeting was the American Convention on Human Rights, also known as the Pact of San José, Costa Rica. This juridical instrument, binding on those states which ratify or adhere to it, represents the culmination of a process that had begun as long ago as the waning days of the Second World War when the nations of America met in Mexico and decided that a declaration on human rights should be drafted which might eventually be adopted as a convention. The American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man was approved three years later in Bogotá, Colombia at the same time that the Charter of the Organization was adopted. However, it was not given the status of a convention.

The American Convention on Human Rights enumerates the obligations of the States as well as the individual rights which fall under its protection. So that the essential rights of man be effectively protected throughout the American continent, two organs were created to hear cases of violations of human rights: the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. The former had been established in 1959 in anticipation of a convention and, when the Charter of the Organization of American States was amended by virtue of the Protocol of Buenos Aires in 1967, it was raised to the category of an organ of the regional body.

But the Inter-American Court, a tribunal set up as part of the Inter-American system to hear and resolve complaints involving violations of rights inherent to the human being, could not be established and organized before July 18, 1978, date on which the Pact of San José, Costa Rica came into force as a result of the deposit by Grenada of the eleventh instrument of ratification.

On May 22, 1979, at the Seventh Special Session of the OAS General Assembly, the States Parties to the American Convention on Human Rights elected the judges who would make up the Court. Prior to this at the Sixth Special Session (November, 1978) these same Parties chose San José, Costa Rica as the seat of the Court.

The first judges elected to the Inter-American Court were:

MIGUEL RAFAEL URQUÍA MARTÍNEZ (El Salvador)

HUNTLEY EUGENE MUNROE Q.C. (Jamaica)

CÉSAR ORDOÑEZ QUINTERO (Colombia)

MÁXIMO CISNEROS SÁNCHEZ (Peru)

CARLOS ROBERTO REINA IDIÁQUEZ (Honduras)

RODOLFO PIZA ESCALANTE (Costa Rica)

THOMAS BUERGENTHAL (United States of America)

The first meeting of the Court took place on June 29 and 30, 1979, at the OAS headquarters in Washington D.C. Only six of the judges were present, due to the fact that Dr. Urquía had presented his resignation.

At that meeting, the judges elected Dr. Piza Escalante as President and Dr. Cisneros Sánchez as Vice-President and decided to hold their first regular meeting and installation of the court in San José in September, 1979.

The installation was held on Monday, September 3, 1979 at the National Theater, in the presence of the President and other high authorities of the Republic of Costa Rica, the diplomatic corps and special guests. On September 3rd, 4th and 5th, the judges of this newly-created institution were received by the different authorities of the country in a series of ceremonies of great significance and importance to the legal system of America.

As a memento of the ceremonies and events leading to its installation, the Court decided to publish these proceedings which contain some of the speeches delivered, as well as photographs, biographical data on the judges and the text of the American Convention on Human Rights.