

**REMARKS OF LIC. MARIO LEIVA-QUIRÓS,  
PRESIDENT OF THE COSTA RICAN BAR ASSOCIATION,  
ON THE OCCASION OF THE VISIT PAID BY THE JUDGES OF THE INTERAMERICAN  
COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS TO THE ASSOCIATION'S GOVERNING  
COUNCIL ON FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 7 1979.**

Our country feels highly honored today, having been chosen to be the seat of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, not only because of the Court's importance but also because of the beautiful and laudable aims it pursues. The Bar Association can but feel extremely honored at receiving the visit of the distinguished Judges who make up this Court, for the Bar is a body of men and women who truly practice the Law and seek Justice. And as you are called upon to insure that such justice is obtained at an international level, we, the lawyers of Costa Rica, feel that we are united by a kindred spirit and a identity of purpose. So it is that in receiving you today, instead of feeling uncomfortable in our pursuit, we think of ourselves as beings who look for justice in the world in order that our fellowmen might enjoy peace and the full exercise of their rights. It is also a source of satisfaction for us that two of the judges of the Court -Lic. Piza Escalante and Dr. Cisneros- should also be active members of our Association. It is a great coincidence and, of course, brings us great honor.

The struggle for human rights has, to a lesser or greater degree, depending on the era, been constant throughout history. It is natural, however, that it should be in this century that the movement should have flourished. Slavery existed in the times before and after Christ. This was an institution that responded at times to the demands for comfort and at other times to motives of an economic nature. In olden days people needed slaves in order to be able to produce, just as today we need machinery. Most wars were fought simply to obtain slaves. This situation was so firmly rooted in the people of those times that it is worth remembering that a great philosopher of Athens, in protesting the uneven distribution of riches, asked how it was possible that some should have many lands while others only possessed a plot in which to be buried, and how some had hundreds of slaves while others barely one. Cicero calls for the Law and the Constitution in the Roman Senate; however, he claims it only for the Romans. He gets upset when his friend Caesar declares himself a dictator, for that goes against the liberty of the Roman. The tenets of Christ, which for the first time defended the underprivileged and declared us all to be the sons of his God, have the effect of introducing a new concept of the human being which gradually weakens the institution of slavery. Some progress is made in the Middle Ages and although the serf is subjected to abuse, he is already thought of as a human being, even though he lives in the era of cruelty. The monastic orders seek to improve the lot of the destitute and defend and give shelter to those pursued by their prince. The intellectual upheaval of the Renaissance changes the serf and puts an end to serfdom; now the worker beings to emerge, gradually acquiring more rights until he later breaks out with the cry of equality and fraternity of the French Revolution. Despite the fact that these movements happened in the Old Continent, whatever occurs there has its effect on the rest of the world. In America, although at the outset the

Conquistador did not consider the Indian to be a human being but merely an object, this concept changed at the beginning of the sixteenth century and, thanks to fighters like Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, the Indian's situation changed and became the subject of regulations by the crown. But it is in this century, however, that the rights of man are becoming of interest, not only to the isolated thinker, but to Governments and international institutions. War becomes more humane -if it can ever be described as such- and we arrive at a point where the violation of rights receives harsh criticism internationally, even though we have by no means attained total success.

I mention the above because certain people are skeptical that man can live in a society of peace and respect for his personal integrity. But if, as I mentioned, we look at history and at what has been achieved, we realize that the goals pursued by movements such as the one that gave rise to this august Court, must little by little enter the spirit of all men until we achieve the ideal sought by those who wish that respect for those rights becomes an integral part of the sensibility, thinking and preparation of man. To these skeptics we must say that if Christ, with his twelve apostles, was able to have his doctrine followed by millions of men, why then should not a campaign undertaken by so many in order that human rights be universally respected meet with success and, indeed in the short term. Let us be optimistic and give our support to the leaders of this movement, with the conviction that our principles will eventually govern the conduct of the man of the future.

Resolving confrontations between man and his government -one of the many aspects which will be dealt with by this Court- shall undoubtedly be no easy task. This problem was partly responsible for the dissolution of the Central American Court of Justice which functioned in Costa Rica at the beginning of the century. But we have to admit that concepts have changed and if, little by little, nations take the road towards liberty and the democratic system, we can be sure that your judgments shall become the sustenance and support of Americans. Your learning and integrity are sufficient grounds for the success of the Court. You may count yourselves fortunate that Providence has placed the liberty of so many in your hands.