

**Dr. Thomas Buergenthal**  
**Presidente del Instituto Interamericano**  
**de Derechos Humanos**

**M**r. President, it is a great honor for the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and for the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights to welcome you in our common seat. Those of us who have come to love and admire your beautiful country never fail to be amazed and impressed by the genuine commitment of its people and its highest government officials to the cause of human rights and democracy. Your presence here today is yet another example of this commitment and the unswerving support that you and Costa Rica have always given to the rule of law, to individual freedom and to human dignity. We greet you in this house, therefore, as a collaborator in a common cause.

For all of us associated with the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights, it is a source of great pride and satisfaction that this Seminar is taking place and that it is once again being sponsored jointly with the International Committee of the Red Cross, an organization which has administered the application of international humanitarian law throughout the world with an impartiality, ideological neutrality, effectiveness, and a sense of humanitarian mission that is unequalled

by any group or organization charged with the protection of human beings. There are few other, if any, organizations in the world with which this meeting could have been organized and few other, if any, with which our Institute would have wanted to organize it, precisely because there exist so few international institutions whose commitment to and work on behalf of mankind is politically and ideologically neutral. We are therefore profoundly honored, Dr. Moreillon, to have you and the ICRC with us once again.

The Inter-American Institute of Human Rights is a non-governmental academic institution having international legal status. It was established by an agreement between the Government of Costa Rica and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. The Institute's mission is the promotion of human rights through education and research and related activities of an intellectual and scholarly character. We are, in short, an academic rather than an activist organization. We are non-political in the sense that we identify with no political party and no ideological movements. If the Institute can be said to have an ideology, it is to be found in the commitment to human rights, to human dignity, to representative democracy, and the ideals that are reflected in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the American Convention on Human Rights, among others. We believe very strongly in making our Institute into a place in which the human rights issues of our hemisphere can be heard, discussed and studied in an environment of mutual respect. Today's meeting, which brings together individuals of divergent political views and contending ideologies to discuss common problems, is an example of the work the Institute is doing and has been doing under the direction of its excellent Executive Director, Licda. Sonia Picado, who, together with Dr. Jacques Moreillon, deserve most of the credit for organizing it. Dr. Moreillon, incidentally, more than anyone else is the originator of the idea to have these meetings.

This is the second meeting on Human Rights, Humanitarian Law and State Security that the Institute and the ICRC are cosponsoring. Others, I hope, will follow. The focus of the first meeting, which took place in San Jose in 1982, was the hemisphere as a whole; the focus of today's meeting is Central America.

A few years ago, our focus might well have been the Southern Cone, the cradle of the doctrine of state security; today it must unfortunately be Central America, which has become the battleground between contending political forces, between ideological blocs, between terrorism and repression, where violations of human rights committed by governments and insurgents alike are sought to be justified on grounds of political necessity, ideological imperatives and considerations of state security. It is not the purpose of this conference to allocate blame or to exchange accusations. Our purpose, instead, is to explore ways in which legitimate governmental and political interests can be protected in an environment in which certain fundamental principles of international humanitarian law and international human rights law are observed and respected. Our hypothesis is that this is an attainable objective.

We have brought together for this conference human rights experts, specialists in humanitarian law and officials responsible for the protection of the security of the state. There was a time when human rights specialists dealt only with violations that occurred in peace-time and humanitarian law experts with those that took place in time of war, and when governments knew how to distinguish between war and peace. In our region, at this moment, we live in a twilight zone between war and peace, where all these neat doctrinal distinctions from days gone by are of little help in dealing with the problem that the states and the people of this region face. It is the purpose of this Conference to deal with this phenomenon of our time and our region in the hope of saving human lives and promoting respect for human rights.

It is a profound pleasure and honor for the Institute to welcome you to this important meeting.