

Fourth World Conference for Advocates and Barristers

Jannie Eksteen SC, GCB chair, attended the conference and reports as follows:

The fourth World Conference for Advocates and Barristers was held in Dublin and Belfast from 27 June to 30 June 2008. The conference was attended by approximately 280 advocates and barristers, from England and Wales, Ireland and Northern Ireland, Australia, Hong Kong, Namibia and South Africa. The absence of our colleagues from Zimbabwe due to circumstances in that country was noted with concern and regret. At the initiative of Jeremy Gauntlett SC the conference adopted a resolution in respect of Zimbabwe which is published on page 6 of this issue.

The events began with a cocktail party hosted by the Irish Bar at the National Gallery of Ireland where guests were welcomed by Hugh Mohan SC, the Dublin-based co-chair of the conference. The occasion provided an opportunity for guests from all jurisdictions to meet socially and to enjoy the artistic treasures of Ireland.

The business of the conference commenced the following morning in the Dublin Castle. The official opening of proceedings was attended to by the President of Ireland, Mary Mc Aleese, herself a former member of the Bar in Belfast and previously Director of the Institute of Professional Legal Studies at Queens University in Belfast. In his introduction of President Mc Aleese, Turlogh O'Donnell SC stressed the great tradition of hospitality of the Irish people, a tradition which they certainly honoured at this event.

The first business session on 'The Law and Justice,' chaired by Lord Brian Kerr, Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland, produced an interesting and thought-provoking debate. Three participants addressed the audience, each from a very different perspective. Robert Fisk, a journalist for the British newspaper *The Independent* was first with a powerful presentation of the subject from his perspective as a journalist in war. Robert Fisk has witnessed the realities of violence in Belfast during the trouble times, and also in Iraq during the Persian Gulf War in 1991 and the 2003 invasion. His presentation was followed by an address by the Archbishop of Dublin, Bishop Diamuid Martin, approaching the subject from the perspective of the Roman Catholic Church. The final speaker on the subject was Justice Kate O'Regan of our Constitutional Court. Justice O'Regan, being the only lawyer on the panel, presented a fine demonstration of the distinction between the law and justice with reference to cases from our own history, and suggested a number of lessons learned from the South African experience.

The second session was devoted to 'Lawyers' role in the fight against terror.' The subject was introduced by Judge Adrian Hardiman. This session featured three brilliant speakers on the subject. Michael Mc Dowell SC, a member of the Irish Bar and former Minister of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, was first on the podium, followed by Professor Conner Gearty, a professor in human rights law, and Colm O'Conneide, a barrister and a member of the European Committee of Social Rights. All were agreed that the only role for lawyers was to render their ordinary and usual legal services to persons affected, mainly as accused persons.

The business sessions on 28 June were followed by a gala dinner held at the Mansion in the heart of Dublin. The dinner was a memorable affair with the Irish Bar proving their credentials in hospitality. The following day was spent transferring to Belfast, just in time to proceed to the next social event, a cocktail party hosted by the Bar of Northern Ireland. This event was held at the beautiful premises of the Queens University, where we were welcomed by Noell M'Grenera QC, the Belfast-based co-chair of the conference. Following the cocktail party Rashid Vahed SC and I were privileged to be invited to a dinner as guests of John O'Hare QC, chairman of the Bar in Northern Ireland which was held in the Supreme Court building in Belfast.

The final chapter of the conference commenced with the opening of the business sessions in Belfast. The focus of the final day was firmly on human rights. Three sessions were held dealing with 'International Human Rights in the Frontline,' 'The European Convention on Human Rights' and 'The Importance of an Independent Referral Bar in the Protection of Human Rights.' All three topics produced interesting and quality debates, but it was the first session which was most stimulating. Ms Sandra Hodgkinson, the United States Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defence for Detainee Affairs, attempted valiantly to explain and justify the US policy on detainees with particular reference to detention on Guantanamo Bay. She was followed by Ms Beatrice Mtetwa of Zimbabwe who presented an informative address on the recent events in Zimbabwe. The session was concluded by Ms Shami Chakrabarti, the Director of the National Council for Civil Liberty in the United Kingdom, who placed the views of Ms Hodgkinson in a proper perspective.

The evening of 30 June was devoted to yet another gala dinner held at the National Transport Museum. All in all it was a memorable event for all. As Hugh Mohan SC addressing this gallery so aptly said: 'In Dublin we welcomed you as guests, tonight we greet you as friends.'

