

## Conclusion

My life-long human rights career has taken me from secret prisons in Argentina during the height of the "dirty war," to meetings at the UN General Assembly and international halls of justice. It has taken me from New York to Cape Town, from Bogota to Darfur, and wherever people gather to discuss what is necessary to respond to abuses of any type, and to take action accordingly. It is a great privilege to have been able to work in the field of human rights in a variety of capacities for my entire adult life. I was able to conduct fact-finding, monitoring, advocacy, litigation, teaching, research and writing in my chosen field. It is also rather astonishing, given my personal history.

During the last forty years, I have witnessed countless situations, first in Argentina and then around the world, that have taught me a great deal about what happens when institutions allow the breach of the rule of law and, rather than insisting on accountability, a country prefers to cover up abuses. I have also been able to witness the positive results when a society confronts its legacies of the recent past with honesty and compassion for the victims, and decides that democratic institutions will protect rather than persecute citizens, their rights and their liberties. The lessons of Argentina have always been my touchstone, and ongoing experiences there with prosecutions for past abuses, police and judicial reform, democratic policies for citizens' security, and social and political inclusion of the disenfranchised continue to inspire me. Of course, not everything has been positive in Argentina in the last quarter century. But the commitment, sophistication and inventiveness of Argentine human rights activists is a continuing

example for me. I have also had the opportunity to take a close look at the experience of many other societies, in Latin America and beyond, and from them I draw lessons as well.

.....Human rights work is about *change*. Change from a situation of oppression, whether individual or collective, into one of enjoyment of freedom is the object of our endeavors. For that we need to imagine a world in which every person, especially the disadvantaged and the vulnerable, is able to fulfill all the capacities of the human spirit. Imagination, therefore, is what inspires us. But the world we imagine has to be realized through passion and courage to overcome obstacles in the conviction that truth and justice are on the side of human rights. Passion and courage have to be accompanied with an attitude of dialogue. I do not mean that we need to dialogue with human rights violators, because I am not naïve and I don't believe that perpetrators of heinous crimes can be redeemed or converted if only we talked to them. The dialogue we propose is with broad circles of the public whose indifference to human rights is not guilty but still conspires against effective implementation of rights for all. We need to expand the circles of supporters of human rights in every society not only to enlist them in the struggle of a more just, humane and democratic national arrangement but also to promote and protect human rights in other countries. Our passion, courage of convictions and attitude of dialogue will help us succeed if we reinforce them with an ability to engage in discussion about the facts with rigor and honesty and we do not attempt simply to impose our will. In the 1930s, the Spanish philosopher confronted the fascists who were on the rise with a phrase that is well known to Spanish speakers: "*Vencereis pero no convenceréis.*" The play on words is hard to translate into English, but it means: "You will win, but you will not persuade." The human rights movement's

only weapons are words and peaceful political action, but precisely because of that we fight with the arms of reason. We will succeed not so much if we “win” the debates but if we persuade and convince.