

Editorial

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This issue of the MARYLAND JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL LAW represents the renaissance of a long tradition of scholarly international law discourse at the University of Maryland School of Law. It owes its existence to the vision and persistence of Professors Peter G. Danchin and Michael Van Alstine, as well as to the commitment of the entire international and comparative law faculty. It is my hope that this JOURNAL—previously in print from 1975 to 1999—will become the flagship of Maryland Law’s burgeoning International and Comparative Law Program, which also now boasts an LL.M. curriculum and clinical offerings.

Volume 24 publishes several speeches and panelist essays from an international law symposium that was held here in Baltimore, Maryland in late October 2008. This gathering, whose keynote speakers were Mary Robinson, the former President of Ireland, and Arthur Chaskalson, the first Chief Justice of the Constitutional Court of South Africa, was entitled, “Reflecting on the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”

Interestingly, and contrary to this pessimist’s premonition, the “celebration” did not require of its participants a consensus on what there is today to celebrate about the Universal Declaration. Among the celebrants, several noted the modern failure to implement its vision, attributing great loss, for instance, to the later division of civil and political rights from economic, social, and cultural rights. Others alleged occidental and period-specific “birth defects” within the Universal Declaration. But criticism also was not a prerequisite to participation, as many panelists focused their attention on the proliferation of the Universal Declaration’s commitment to human dignity in modern state constitutions and judicial opinions.

I hope that our readers will find the debates robust, and will engage with what is arguably the underlying issue: whether the Declaration is simply an historical occasion with achievements and shortcomings, or a manifestation of the continuing unfolding of human rights. And if it is a part of the unfolding of human rights, I wonder (as an aside), what preserves us from aberrant “progress”? Perhaps the answer lies at least partly in free and open discourse in media and conferences of the type in which this JOURNAL’S staff was privileged to participate.

THOMAS MACKINNON BROWN
Editor in Chief