



# INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION OF JURISTS

Commission internationale de juristes - Comisión Internacional de Juristas

*" dedicated since 1952 to the primacy, coherence and implementation of international law and principles that advance human rights "*

27 August 2004

IMMEDIATE

## "TIME TO ACT"

### ICJ convenes a conference of lawyers from around the World to defend human rights in the fight against terrorism

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The international legal and human rights community must mobilise and take a global leadership role to show how the rule of law and human rights can and must be respected in addressing terrorism, Nicholas Howen, Secretary General of the International Commission of Jurists said today in Berlin.

In his opening address at the ICJ's Biennial Conference on Counter-terrorism and Human Rights, Howen noted that "the war against terrorism" is challenging our most basic assumptions about the rule of law and human rights. "We thought we would never have to answer again whether someone who commits barbaric acts can be treated inhumanly. Instead, we witness governments again trying to justify torture in the name of national security, detainees held in legal black holes, the right to a fair trial cut down."

"Have governments collectively declared a global state of emergency? If so, let us remember that any state of emergency must be an extension of the rule of law, not an abrogation of it," declared Howen.

The conference brings together more than a 150 international legal and human rights experts from around the world, to take action on counter-terrorism measures that violate human rights.

Many countries across the world have been plagued by cycles of terrorism and excessive counter-terrorism and for decades legal experts and human rights activists have struggled to defend the rule of law. The ICJ has from its inception worked on these countries, but today, the threat to the rule of law has become greater, widespread and global and risks becoming entrenched.

"For 52 years the ICJ has played a pivotal role in defining and promoting the rule of law. Today the ICJ's role is as critical as ever: the rule of law is the first defence against arbitrary power".

The ICJ has made the defence of fundamental rights in the face of counter-terrorism measures one of its highest priorities. This year, it will convene a **panel of eminent jurists** to investigate whether such measures respect global human rights laws. This panel will spend the next year listening to lawyers, human rights defenders and victims in countries in all parts of the world in a series of national and regional hearings. The jurists will report to the ICJ on their findings, which will guide the organisation's future work.

The ICJ conference, which is hosted by the German Foreign Ministry, ends tomorrow with the adoption of a **declaration on defending human rights in the fight against terrorism**. It will affirm the commitment of the worldwide ICJ network of lawyers, judges and human rights defenders to work together to ensure counter-terrorism measures abide by human rights.

The conference is co-sponsored by the Government of Germany, the Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung and NOVIB.

The ICJ is an international non-governmental organisation comprising sixty of the world's most eminent jurists and has a worldwide network of national sections and affiliated organisations