

## THE CUBAN EMBARGO AND HUMAN RIGHTS

*Intercultural Human Rights Law Review Annual Symposium*

October 24, 2008

### **THE PRESIDENT'S WELCOME ADDRESS**

REV. MONSIGNOR FRANKLYN M. CASALE\*

I welcome everybody warmly to the law school at St. Thomas University. We are especially pleased to host this symposium on such an important topic. I would like to thank the members of the *Intercultural Human Rights Law Review* for assembling us all here this morning to discuss the Cuban Embargo and human rights. In particular, I would like to thank Professor Siegfried Wiessner, who is the leader of human rights studies in Florida and the founder of the Intercultural Human Rights program here at St. Thomas University, of which we are so justly proud. Thank you, Professor Wiessner. I would like to heartily thank Roza Pati for her part in making this program such a success, as well as the members of the *Law Review* who have put this program together today.

This program continues a series of important examinations of issues relating to human rights. St. Thomas University has a unique mission in the area of human rights and human dignity with its Human Rights Institute and its Master's and Doctorate degree programs in Intercultural Human Rights. These programs emerge from the tradition of the Catholic Church and the Archdiocese of Miami, our sponsors. St. Thomas University has become a leader in the study and research of human rights. This was recognized last year when I was invited by our Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen to testify before the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Congress on the subject of human trafficking, a topic of one of the former symposia of the Graduate Program in Intercultural Human Rights.

This year, I am happy to note that we have expanded our

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symposium program with the First Annual Awards dinner at which Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen will be the keynote speaker. At the dinner we will bestow our first Annual Human Rights Award on our dear friend and colleague, Professor Michael Reisman, who has been with us so many times before, and who is a distinguished scholar in the field. Thank you again for coming, Professor.

The subject we are discussing today, under the auspices of the *Intercultural Human Rights Law Review*, can be considered one of the more neuralgic international issues. It generates an enormous amount of response, and sometimes that response becomes somewhat strident. Many have opinions on both sides of the issue. The discussion rises regularly to the highest levels, even to the point where it becomes the subject of a vote in the United Nations. Somewhat tangentially related, but certainly relating to the issue, is the question whether there ought to be any discussion at all with the government of Cuba itself. Although the issues involved are complex, they are fundamentally about the lives of the Cuban people.

So, I leave the conclusions to these issues to our distinguished speakers today, who I am sure will structure a positive dialogue, rather than present typically useless arguments on the subject. We also should be able to respectfully, at all times, examine an issue and speak to one another in a productive manner, no matter what the subject. I am happy to offer our University as the forum in which this dialogue takes place. The University is a neutral place where ideas are raised to the highest level for explanation and debate. I am proud that this is happening at St. Thomas University today.

I hope that God blesses the fruits of the dialogue today with every benefit, especially for the people of Cuba.