

PRESENTATION OF THE SERIES, Volume I

Over a year ago, in September 1994, the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights (IIDH) established two new series of publications in the form of *occasional papers*. The first, *Basic Studies in Human Rights*, has already appeared (first four volumes) and is designed, as its name indicates, to address more general human rights issues of interest to the public at large. With the instant publication, *Specialized Studies in Human Rights*, the IIHR inaugurates the second series. Its focus is on specific human rights issues of particular concern to specialists in the field. These two publications are not intended to take the place of the IIHR's other publications or its periodicals. They are designed, instead, to complement them and thereby to strengthen the IIDH's promotional and academic activities.

The international law of human rights has grown dramatically over the past five decades. The end of the Cold War has accelerated this process. We now have a vast body of law in this field and numerous institutions and mechanisms, universal and regional, designed to prod States into complying with their international obligations. While the existence of that law marks an important step forward on mankind's march towards a world that treats all human beings with dignity and respect for their human rights, the struggle to achieve that objective is far from over. Most of the universal and regional intergovernmental institutions and mechanisms established to promote and protect human rights remain weak, and human rights continue to be violated on a large scale in many parts of the world. Specialists in the field thus have no lack of subjects to study.

The IIHR, an independent academic institution established to advance the cause of human rights through educational, research and promotional activities, with special emphasis on the Americas, seeks to contribute to the development and understanding of international human rights law and to the strengthening of its enforcement machinery. In recent years the IIHR has been actively involved, among other things, with the current series of United Nations World Conferences on the Environment and Development (1992), Human Rights (1993), Population and Development (1994), Social Development (1995), and Women (1995). The Conferences have sought to elevate human rights issues to a central place on the agenda of contemporary international relations.

The IIDH has been equally attentive to the development of the inter-American human rights protection system in the context of the universality of human rights and to the mechanisms that have been or might be established to strengthen it. It has also focused on the role of non-governmental organizations and on the interaction between national governments, inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations in promoting human rights and on emerging protective mechanisms. These and related topics will be examined in depth by recognized experts in the pages of the series *Specialized Studies in Human Rights*. It is hoped that this publication will stimulate a constructive dialogue on these important issues and thus contribute to the improvement of human rights in our region and the world at large.

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