

# ICJ BRANCH FOR DARWIN

The Territory became the last mainland jurisdiction in Australia to form its own branch of the International Committee of Jurists (ICJ) when it met for its inaugural meeting at William Forster Chambers on 27 October 2000. Uniquely placed close to Asia, the Darwin based branch plans to focus on practical and realistic projects particularly in closely neighbouring East Timor.

The ICJ is an international, non-government organisation based in Geneva with formal consultative status to the United Nations. Among its primary concerns are the protection and promotion of human rights and the independence of the judiciary.

According to President Mr Colin McDonald QC one of the reasons that the Australian section of the ICJ was particularly keen to see a branch in the Territory is the geographic proximity to East Timor.

"The NT branch has been asked by the Australian section to specifically look at and become involved in practical and realistic projects in East Timor that will help contribute to the rule of law, independence of the judiciary and development of the legal profession in East Timor.

"That is not to say we are not interested and won't be interested in issues here in the Territory. One issue that members of the branch are clearly interested in is mandatory sentencing," said Mr McDonald.

"Other areas that the ICJ have traditionally

been involved in which will potentially impact on the Territory is international covenants and the observance of international human rights laws. They may from time to time bob up in the NT context and we, in conjunction with the national body, might involve ourselves with those issues but not to the point that we are repeating what is done by other able bodies like the Law Society, the Bar Association and so on", he said.

"We do have a speaking role and a promotional role but in particular to issues relating to the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary which is a live issue in the Territory."

Fact finding missions, observing and monitoring political contentious trials, training, networking and solidarity building are some of the tools used by the ICJ to achieve its goals.

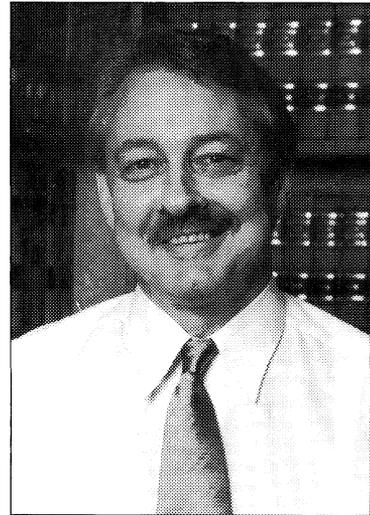
Justice John Dowd, President of the Australian Section of the ICJ, welcomed the formation of the Northern Territory branch.

"The formation of the NT branch of the ICJ is very welcome. The Northern Territory is geographically close to areas like East Timor, where good work can be done to protect human rights and uphold the rule of law for ordinary people," said Justice Dowd.

While East Timor is a priority, the local branch is also interested in rule of law issues throughout the Asian region.

"What we propose to do is have a series of committees with conveners from this branch who will have responsibility in relation to say East Timor, Malaysia, Singapore, Burma, Cambodia, Thailand, those sort of places. We are keeping our focus very local and achievable," said Mr McDonald.

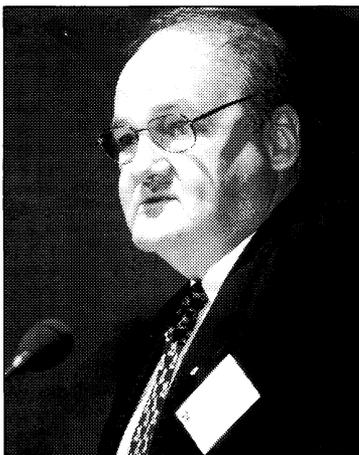
The elected executive committee is President Mr Colin McDonald QC, Vice President Ms Sally Gearin and Treasurer/Secretary Ms Helen Campbell. Application forms for membership are available from William Forster Chambers on telephone: 8981 8322.



Colin McDonald QC

## ICJ OBJECTIVES

1. The legal protection and promotion of all human rights including economic, social and cultural rights;
2. The observance of the Rule of Law in the context of globalisation;
3. The promotion and protection of the independence of the judges and lawyers
4. Participation in human rights mechanisms, norms, and their implementation at the universal, regional and national level;
5. Fighting impunity;
6. Abolition of the death penalty.



ICJ Australian Section President  
Justice John Dowd