

Governor-General and Michael Kirby AC CMG appointed Castan Centre Patrons



Michael Kirby AC CMG with Deputy Director Dr Paula Gerber



Her Excellency
Ms Quentin Bryce AC

The Castan Centre for Human Rights Law is proud to announce that Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce AC, Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia, has graciously accepted the position of Patron-in-Chief of the Centre. The Hon. Michael Kirby AC CMG, former justice of the High Court of Australia, has kindly accepted the position of Patron.

Ms Bryce noted that she was "Delighted to accept the position of Patron-in-Chief". Mr Kirby was equally pleased with the invitation, saying "I applaud all that the Centre has achieved in the past 10 years. My links with the centre go back to my friendship with Ron Castan and admiration for his

wonderful advocacy, which the centre helps to keep alive through its work".

Director of the Centre, Professor Sarah Joseph stated "we are very excited that the Governor-General and Michael Kirby now hold honorary positions with the Centre. The Governor-General's commitment to human rights is a hallmark of her distinguished career, which has included stints as Queensland Director of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission and Federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner. Michael Kirby is well known to the centre. He has been a strong supporter of ours since he launched the centre in September 2000."

Celebrating 10 busy years

As Australia's interest in human rights grew in the 1990s, a small band of interested academics began to congregate in the Law Faculty at Monash University. They worked independently or collaborated on discrete human rights projects, but they soon decided that more needed to be done. Sarah Joseph and Julie Debeljak, then budding lecturers, pushed the idea of an academic centre devoted to the protection and promotion of human rights. The Law Faculty provided cash and in-kind support and led a nation-wide search for the centre's inaugural director. Professor David Kinley was chosen for the role.

While the centre was being set up, renowned barrister Ron Castan QC died unexpectedly. His support for human rights was legendary and he led some of Australia's most famous human rights cases, most notably *Mabo v Queensland*, which rightfully restored land rights to many Indigenous communities. Ron was also involved in the establishment of the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service and revitalised Liberty Victoria (then known as the Victorian Council for Civil Liberties). After Ron's death, the idea of naming the centre after him seemed like the natural thing to do. We were launched in October

2000 by Justice Michael Kirby.

The early years were the most difficult, but the centre gradually built a sustainable funding base and started to make its mark. Under David's leadership, the centre built a rapport with state and federal governments which continues to this day. The centre has become a trusted voice on human rights and has conducted training for state, federal and international governmental bodies.

Another seed was planted in 2002 when Vanessa Szabo and Douglas Stewart became the first Castan Centre supported interns to the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva. From 2005, the year Sarah Joseph became our second Director, the Centre built on this placement and created its Global Internship Program. Since then, 29 students have travelled to human rights organisations on five continents and the centre intends to send another 10 in 2010. Student programs have become a highlight of the Castan Centre's work, with well-established annual mooting and essay competitions and an in-house internship program in its fifth year. The centre has also sent more than 30 students on internships with Indigenous organisations as part of the Aurora Project.

Above all else, the Castan Centre has become known for rigorous research and its public events. In recent years, Centre research projects have produced numerous publications including plain-English handbooks for corporations on human rights, for torture victims seeking redress and for lawyers dealing with alleged terrorists, among others. It has teamed with Oxford University Press to create a groundbreaking database of headnotes on every complaint decided by the UN human rights treaty bodies. The centre also now hosts more than 10 public events each year, plus its highly-anticipated annual conference and several roundtables and workshops. We are particularly proud that most of those events are free-of-charge.

Of course, our work would be impossible without our supporters, who are too numerous to name in this short piece – you know who you are! We have grown to have over 2000 members and appropriately, for this tenth anniversary, we now have two patrons in the persons of the Governor-General (Patron-in-Chief) and Michael Kirby.

As the centre enters its second decade, we will continue to help embed a human rights culture in Australia.