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The NGO Coalition Against Impunity: A Forgotten Chapter in the Struggle Against Impunity

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Abstract

As Latin American countries moved from military dictatorship to civilian government in the 1980s, a burning issue was how to deal with the massive repression and grave human rights violations of the recent past. Should there be an effort to hold perpetrators accountable, or simply “turn the page?” This article documents and analyzes the history of the NGO Coalition Against Impunity and its role in advocating for the United Nations (U.N.) to recognize impunity—or, the negation of accountability—as a serious human rights issue. The combined efforts of dedicated human rights leaders and organizations in Latin America, other NGOs such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, and the Coalition spurred the U.N. and other bodies such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to take up the issue of impunity in their documents and missions. The work of the Coalition is presented as an example of the incremental democratization of the United Nations system.

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This article focuses on the work of the Coalition of NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) Concerned with Impunity for Violators of Human Rights, later shortened to the NGO Coalition Against Impunity, its efforts to oppose institutionalized impunity, and its defense of accountability before the law for massive human rights crimes. Like many other organizations, mainly in Latin America, the Coalition was distressed by the wave of exculpatory laws, court rulings, and decrees absolving Latin American military-security forces that had carried out massive, aberrant, and atrocious human rights crimes. Impunity is defined here as freedom from accountability or punishment for serious state crimes or abuses of power. Exemption from prosecution—impunity—was a central demand and a primary condition placed by armed forces upon incoming civilian governments during the region’s transitions from authoritarian rule. The term, which originated in Latin America, was relatively unknown elsewhere in the 1980s. The struggle against impunity, and the work of the Coalition, deserve an important place within human rights education in Latin American countries and in the United States.

The Coalition Against Impunity, based in New York, functioned between 1987 and 1991. It had working relations with dozens of Latin American human rights organizations and hundreds of human rights leaders, as well as relatives of the victims. It did pioneering work to bring the issue of impunity to the United Nations (U.N.) and other international bodies. Delegates of the Coalition attended sessions of the U.N. and its specialized agencies in New York and Geneva, submitted draft resolutions, position papers, and declarations to the U.N. explaining the scale and gravity of impunity in Latin America and urged specific U.N. actions. The Coalition met with other NGOs in Geneva and elsewhere, as well as with delegates of states. It attended meetings and tribunals in Latin America. It worked to bring together multiple

organizations and individuals demanding justice and the rule of law in the region.¹

The Coalition's work can be understood within the context of the democratization of the United Nations system. The U.N., formed on the basis of state sovereignty at its inception, gradually provided new openings for organizations and NGOs representing ordinary citizens. Beginning in the 1980s, the number of NGOs accredited to the U.N. with consultative status surged. Many NGOs introduced crucial issues to the U.N.—issues ignored by states or considered to be inimical to state interests. NGOs are seen today as crucial links with civil society.

In a December 1987 communication, the then recently organized Coalition wrote,

We are a group of individuals and representatives from non-governmental organizations greatly concerned with an alarming trend occurring throughout Latin America and other parts of the world: recently established civilian governments granting amnesty to members of the military involved in gross violations of human rights... To establish the principle that military forces are above international law sets a dangerous precedent... Our Coalition was formed to begin to organize an international response. (Coalition Against Impunity, 1987)

The Coalition devised new ways to influence the U.N. system and to serve as a channel for Latin Americans opposing impunity.

The aim of this article is to record the essentially forgotten history of the Coalition and analyze its role in advocating for the U.N. to recognize impunity as a serious human rights issue. The combined efforts of dedicated human rights leaders in Latin America, other NGOs, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, and the Coalition persuaded the U.N. and other bodies such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to take up the issue of impunity in their documents and missions. The

¹ This author, representing World University Service-U.S., was a founder and Steering Committee member of the Coalition, and thus writes as both a participant/observer and analyst of its work. She retained a file on the Coalition, although it is incomplete.

Coalition perceived impunity as much broader than a narrow legal question. As will be elaborated in this article, impunity has social, political, and moral dimensions that shape and limit the development of democratic processes.

In the 1980s, as many Latin American countries began transitions from military dictatorships to civilian governments, impunity became a burning issue. What should be done with the perpetrators of massive crimes against humanity, committed in the name of national security? Courageous Latin American organizations demanded justice and rejected the argument that impunity was required for “reconciliation.” But all too often their voices were ignored. The military dictatorships in Latin America, often supported by Washington, had carried out gross, systematic, lawless violations of human rights—using illegal methods such as mass disappearances,² torture, extrajudicial execution, rape, abduction of children—with the conviction that they were above the law. Before and during the transitions to civilian rule, the dictatorships implanted what I have termed “guardian structures” and mechanisms of impunity to ensure that they would never face justice (for early analyses see McSherry, 1995, 1997, 1998). Facing consolidating regimes of impunity, tenacious individuals and social groups in the region began to organize to overcome them in the 1970s and beyond. Justice seekers and impunity challengers (Lessa, 2022) refused to ‘forgive and forget’ atrocious crimes against humanity.³

This article proceeds as follows: 1) The origins of the U.N. and the concept of its democratization are presented; 2) the national security dictatorships in Latin America are examined, as well as the model of

² The International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, adopted in 2010, states in Article 2: “enforced disappearance’ is considered to be the arrest, detention, abduction or any other form of deprivation of liberty by agents of the State or by persons or groups of persons acting with the authorization, support or acquiescence of the State, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person, which place such a person outside the protection of the law.” <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-convention-protection-all-persons-enforced>

³ Crimes against humanity are systematic, extralegal attacks by the state against civilian populations and include genocide, torture, enforced disappearance, and other crimes. See U.N. “Crimes Against Humanity,” at <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/crimes-against-humanity.shtml>.

“democratization with impunity” (Andreu, 1995); 3) the significance of impunity is analyzed and early academic perspectives reviewed; and 4) the work of the Coalition in the international arena is documented.

The United Nations and the International System

The U.N. was formed in 1945 after a process that began in Dumbarton Oaks earlier that year. The world was emerging from World War II and the horrors of the Nazis. Peoples worldwide sought peace and respect for human rights. Representatives of 50 countries came together at the United Nations Conference on International Organization in San Francisco, California, from April 25 to June 26, 1945. A charter was drafted for a new international organization, the United Nations. The global organization was created to safeguard international peace and security and to prevent another world war.

In 1946, the U.N. created a body comprised of member states, known as the Commission on Human Rights (CHR), to promote international human rights. In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the U.N. General Assembly in Paris on December 10, during its 183rd plenary session. The Preamble declared that disregard and contempt for human rights had resulted in barbarous acts which had outraged the conscience of mankind. Representatives with different legal and cultural backgrounds from the East, West, and developing world had drafted the document. For the first time, fundamental human rights—civil, political, economic, social, and cultural—were proclaimed to be universally protected.

The U.N. was founded on noble principles: to protect and promote international peace and security, to resolve international conflicts by peaceful means, and to secure the human rights of all people (United Nations, 1945; United Nations, 2004; Jolly et al., 2009). But there was a tension at the heart of the organization. While its goals were universal and global, the organization was based upon the autonomy and sovereign equality of states. That is, the U.N. was never visualized as a world government. States were sovereign, the major actors in the international system, and guided by their own perceptions of national interest. Thus, at times, state interests (as defined by particular governments) came into conflict with the objectives of the U.N.

States could block U.N. initiatives, such as visits by human rights bodies to ascertain the situation of human rights in their countries. Any permanent member of the Security Council (made up of the victors in World War II: the U.S., Soviet Union, Britain, France, and China) could veto initiatives in that body. In contrast, the General Assembly (made up of all states) operated on the principle of one state, one vote.

NGOs assumed an increasingly important role as crucial actors within the U.N. The Encyclopedia Britannica defines the role of NGOs as follows:

NGOs perform a variety of functions. They provide information and technical expertise to governments and international organizations (such as specialized agencies of the U.N.) on various international issues, often supplying local information unavailable to governments. NGOs may advocate on behalf of specific policies, such as debt relief or the banning of landmines (e.g., the International Campaign to Ban Landmines), and they may provide humanitarian relief and development assistance (e.g., the Red Cross, Oxfam, and CARE). NGOs may also monitor human rights or the implementation of environmental regulations (e.g., the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and Transparency International). (Karns, 2022)

From its inception, the U.N. had provided some access to NGOs. Article 71 of the Charter stated,

The Economic and Social Council [ECOSOC] may make suitable arrangements for consultation with non-governmental organizations which are concerned with matters within its competence. Such arrangements may be made with international organizations and, where appropriate, with national organizations after consultation with the Member of the United Nations concerned. (United Nations, 1945)

Some 1200 voluntary organizations were present at the U.N. founding conference, and they were instrumental in the inclusion of Article 71 (Alger, 2002; Ross, 2017). NGOs were recognized for representing the interests of people and societies, apart from the state. They were seen as a channel for

the voices of people excluded from the state-centric system, concerned with issues such as social development, human rights, and the environment. In 1948, there were 41 NGOs accredited to the U.N. In the 1980s, accelerating activism, globalization, and advances in technology led to an increase of NGOs seeking a voice at the U.N. By 1991, there were 928 NGOs (Stephenson, 2005). As of April 2021, 5,593 NGOs held active consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (United Nations, 2022).

This growth of NGOs and their participation at the international level can be seen as the gradual democratization of the U.N. system, at least, and of the international system as a whole, at best. Some scholars have referred to this phenomenon as the emergence of an international civil society (Otto, 1996). Since the 1990s, the number of NGOs from the developing world in particular has exponentially increased. Their growing inclusion in the U.N. has meant that the priorities and opinions of long-excluded voices are heard and sometimes acted upon. NGOs are generally rooted in communities and are closely linked to national problems, sometimes more so than states themselves. NGOs often push for programs of social transformation and public welfare. The American Anti-Slavery Society,⁴ formed in 1839, may have been the first international NGO. NGOs may provide specialized expertise in the public interest and/or services on the ground. NGOs have influenced key debates and policies in the areas of human rights, the environment, women, development, and disarmament, among other themes. One can argue that the very structure of the state-centric model of the international system has opened to some extent, incorporating non-state and non-elite voices via NGOs.

This is not to say that all NGOs represent the voices of ordinary people or that NGOs possess countervailing power to states. Some NGOs, such as the Business Roundtable, speak for private interests and elite social sectors. States still dominate the international system. At times, the voices of NGOs are ignored or suppressed. The U.N. is still an organization based upon states as autonomous actors and sovereign decision-makers. For example, the work

⁴ <https://www.antislavery.org/about-us/history/>

of NGOs representing victims and survivors of state violence,⁵ and of missions by the U.N. itself,⁶ has been impeded by hostile states. In that sense, one cannot argue that the international system is sufficiently democratized; it remains in a nascent stage.

Social Mobilization and Repression

The Cold War years of the 1960s and 1970s were tumultuous in Latin America. After World War II, and especially after the 1959 Cuban revolution, there was a growing clamor ‘from below’ for social and political change. In the context of severe social inequality, poverty, and political exclusion across the continent, people demanded the restructuring of inequitable political and economic systems and the empowering of marginalized social sectors, thus challenging entrenched elites. Unions became more politicized and militant, in some cases defying their own leadership; peasant organizations demanded land reform; students demonstrated against imperialism and oligarchy and demanded the democratization of the university. Intellectuals and artists joined movements for social change. Progressive presidents were elected. Jacobo Árbenz, elected in 1950 in Guatemala, tried to reduce the

⁵ In the 1970s and 80s, founding members of the Madres of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina and the Guatemalan Mutual Support Group (GAM) in Guatemala, for example, were abducted, tortured, and murdered by repressive forces to silence their demands for justice. Argentine death squads tortured and murdered the Madres Azucena Villaflor, Esther Ballestrino, María Ponce de Bianco, Angela Auad, and Sister Léonie Duquet; in Guatemala death squads murdered GAM founders Hector Gómez Calito and Maria del Rosario Godoy de Cueva.

⁶ Special Rapporteurs of the U.N. acting in areas including torture and health were refused access to Guantánamo Bay by the U.S. government. Another key example took place in Guatemala. The International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) was formed in 2006 as a partnership between the U.N. and the government. CICIG had notable successes in uncovering and dismantling criminal networks and prosecuting corrupt officials. When a hostile government took power, it not only dissolved CICIG in 2019 but expelled or arrested former leaders of the organization. See Organization of American States, “IACHR Expresses Concern over New Violations of Judicial Independence in Guatemala,” February 2022, at https://www.oas.org/en/IACHR/jsForm/?File=/en/iachr/media_center/PReleases/2022/037.asp, and WOLA, “Los hechos: El legado de la CICIG en la lucha contra la corrupción en Guatemala” (2019) at <https://www.wola.org/es/analisis/los-hechos-el-legado-de-la-cicig-en-la-lucha-contra-la-corrupcion-en-guatemala>

monopoly power of the U.S.-based United Fruit Company. He bought some of its unused lands to distribute to peasant families, awakening hostility from the company and the U.S. government. In Brazil, João Goulart became president in 1961, despite the enmity of the military and business sectors, given his progressive politics during two terms as vice president. In 1964, he announced his plan for *Reformas Basicas* (Basic Reforms) in key sectors: agriculture, finance, the electoral and education systems, among others. These reforms sought to address the plight of the poor and were received with much animosity by the armed forces and other conservative sectors of society. In Chile, democratic and socialist president Salvador Allende (1970-73) embarked on a far-reaching political project to raise the standard of living for the poor and working classes. He nationalized the copper mines (owned by U.S. corporations) with the full support of Congress and introduced measures to provide milk to schoolchildren and build housing for shantytown dwellers. Struggles for social justice appeared in almost all of Latin America. Several guerrilla movements, influenced by the Cuban revolution, also emerged.

The region's militaries and the U.S. government shared a virulent Cold War national security doctrine that defined all social and political movements, whether armed or not, as actual or potential security threats. Whole sectors of society—unionists, peasants, Indigenous peoples, students, teachers, priests, nuns, artists, musicians, and others—were considered potential 'internal enemies' and 'subversives.' A wave of military coups swept the region, most supported by the United States. Árbenz was ousted in 1954, and coups overthrew Goulart in 1964 and Allende in 1973. Thousands of people were targeted, and tens of thousands 'disappeared' or died under brutal military dictatorships.⁷ The regimes used massive, shocking forms of violence to terrorize societies and erase even the memory of mass movements for social justice. The generalized repression of the Cold War years in Latin America, and the emergence of the covert Operation Condor, visited trauma and fear across the region. The use of state terror was a central pillar of a

⁷ See, for example, the truth commission reports of Argentina, Chile, Peru, El Salvador, and Guatemala. In Guatemala the armed forces killed some 200,000 people, "disappeared" 45,000 more, and committed 646 massacres.

countersubversive strategy to demobilize civil society, eliminate political opposition, instill fear, and, “change the mentality” of the region’s people, in the words of Chilean general Augusto Pinochet (Government of Chile, "Discurso del general Pinochet del 11 de octubre de 1973" 1974, and "Declaración de Principios del Gobierno de Chile," 1974).

Operation Condor was a secret, multinational alliance of six South American military states dedicated to pursuing beyond their territories exiles and refugees considered political enemies. Death squadrons of intelligence operatives crossed borders to target people fleeing the dictatorships. Despite often having the protection of U.N. refugee status, hundreds were abducted, tortured, and killed in other countries, or ‘renditioned’ to their countries of origin, where they faced torture and death.⁸ Operation Condor allowed the military regimes to target their opponents wherever they went; the member states suspended sovereignty rights and traditions of asylum and collaborated with foreign squads operating on their soil. High-profile assassinations were carried out in Europe and the United States, as well. Operation Condor must be understood as an unprecedented and crucial component of the larger continental counterinsurgency regime. The Condor system operated across a vast geographical area, with the knowledge and secret sustenance of Washington, creating a powerful system of repression. Operation Condor was, in essence, a transnational, right-wing terrorist network run by the military dictatorships of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay, with Peru and Ecuador in less central roles.

Latin Americans Fight Impunity

In the 1980s most of the Latin American countries began to undergo transitions to civilian government. Nevertheless, state-enforced impunity often shielded the perpetrators of the horrors of the counterinsurgency wars. In many, if not most countries, the armed forces had implanted “guardian” structures beforehand to limit and control the democratization process and

⁸ For a sampling of books on Operation Condor, see Almada, 1989; Blixen, 1998; Calloni, 1999 and 2016; Cunha, 2017; Dinges, 2005; Lessa, 2022; López, 2016; McSherry, 2005; Meilinger de Sannemann, 1994.

demanded mechanisms of impunity as a condition for giving up power. In about 16 countries some form of impunity law was enacted.

In Chile, Pinochet established a military-dominated national security council to supervise the incoming civilian government; decreed limits to political participation; curtailed powers for civilian institutions; decreed that at least 10% of copper profits would permanently go to the army; packed the Supreme Court with numerous new, permanent, pro-military judges; and named nine (out of 47) 'senators for life' in Congress. Pinochet had issued a self-amnesty in 1978 via decree-law No. 2.191 (Diario Oficial, 1978), which removed responsibility for crimes committed between September 11, 1973 (the military coup) and March 10, 1978. Amnesties, pardons, and other such laws were also mandated in Brazil (1979), Uruguay (1986), Argentina (1983, 1986, 1987 and 1989), Guatemala (1986), Honduras (1987), El Salvador (1987 and 1993) and Peru (1995) among other countries (for a legal perspective see Norris, 1992). Thus, patterns of impunity were extended or reproduced under new civilian governments.

The outgoing armed forces were acting to protect their own power and personnel, but also to entrench exclusionary political and economic systems and perpetuate the decisive military role in politics. Chile, Brazil, and Uruguay moved to civilian rule after explicit elite pacts were negotiated that foreclosed the possibility of accountability for human rights crimes. The same was true later in Peru, Ecuador, and Guatemala. Even in Argentina, where the 1982 Falklands/Malvinas War had weakened the military and damaged its credibility, the regime attempted to negotiate concessions and limit popular participation during a long period of 18 months before ceding power to a civilian government. President Raúl Alfonsín established a truth commission and brought the junta members to trial, which were unprecedented acts in the region. He sent a bill to Congress annulling the military's self-amnesty law. But a right-wing reaction buried the burgeoning movement for justice. Pressures from the military and four violent uprisings by *golpista* military rebels known as *carapintadas*—at least three implicitly supported by the army as an institution—rejected the claims of justice, vindicated the 'war against subversion,' and demanded an end to trials for human rights crimes.

The first mutinies resulted in the *Punto Final* and Due Obedience laws, which effectively terminated the trials of hundreds of lower-ranking officers accused of torture and murder. Tens of thousands of Argentines protested the move toward impunity (McSherry, 1997). Polls showed that 90 percent of the public was opposed to the *Punto Final*. Moreover, rather than appease the claims of military *golpistas*, the two laws encouraged them to demand more. Then in 1989 and 1990, President Carlos Menem pardoned the remaining imprisoned repressors. The search for justice was frustrated for years afterward.

Elsewhere in the region, as in Chile, Uruguay, and Brazil, other new civilian governments opted either for truth commissions without trials, or for no accountability processes at all. Thus, military institutions remained powerful and implicitly threatening forces that were able to mute demands for democratic change and counteract efforts to rein in their prerogatives for years after the transitions. Impunity was a key element of the maintenance of political and social control by powerful military forces and their rightist civilian allies by placing perpetrators above the law. Without impunity for its agents, a state's strategies of terror could begin to lose their capacity to shape social behavior, and the state's repressive structures and tactics would become vulnerable. The elite 'coup coalitions' that had ruled during the dictatorships sought to prevent "a resurgence of subversion": essentially, new social demands for greater participation and rights, for socioeconomic benefits, for a greater share of political power, and for an impartial system of justice. With impunity, the perpetrators who had carried out atrocious state crimes were deemed untouchable. Impunity was institutionalized by various means: civil-military pacts of transition, executive decrees and pardons, amnesties or other legislation, and civil and military court decisions. These mechanisms reinforced the status of powerful military and security personnel as a caste above the law. Patterns of impunity formed part of an authoritarian legacy with far-reaching ramifications (see, among others, Sikkink, 2011; McSherry, 1992; McSherry and Molina Mejía, 1992).⁹ Meanwhile, those who had been marginalized and repressed during the so-called 'dirty wars'

⁹ There is a vast literature on impunity, as a quick Internet search will reveal. See especially works by Jo-Marie Burt, Cath Collins, and Francesca Lessa.

found themselves marginalized again under new civilian governments. A double standard of justice took shape. Impunity for past crimes against humanity thus affected the present and the future, shaping the limits and possibilities of re-democratizing countries.

Latin Americans expressed their rejection of impunity in various ways. Hundreds of thousands of Uruguayans opposed absolving military torturers and killers and ending the process of justice. A movement against the Ley de Caducidad, Uruguay's 1986 'amnesty law,' gathered 634,000 signatures in a referendum to overturn the law (*Los Angeles Times*, April 16, 1989). In Chile, the 1978 Amnesty Law made it impossible for relatives to find answers to the whereabouts of the 'disappeared' and to obtain justice. In a 1988 plebiscite, the majority of Chileans voted against the continuation of the Pinochet regime and called for moving to civilian government. A civilian president, Patricio Aylwin, was elected. Pressure from human rights groups motivated him to set up a commission to document the abuses in that country. But Aylwin was limited by Chile's pacted transition, which required him to retain Pinochet's authoritarian 1980 Constitution, allowing the former dictator to remain head of the army for eight years, and then permitted Pinochet to become a 'permanent member' of the Senate, thus providing him impunity (McSherry, 1997). In all three countries, the militaries had threatened dire consequences if the process of justice continued.

Impunity facilitated the emergence of narrow, elitist forms of democracy, in stark contrast to the socially defined, radical-democratic, inclusionary visions that had inspired broad popular movements in the 1960s and 1970s. The political systems bequeathed by the dictatorships were shaped by structural legacies of the national security states: entrenched areas of military power over civilians and militarized state institutions. Security forces retained a threatening presence and influenced policymaking. Intelligence organizations permeated society and continued their surveillance of political and social actors; politicized military institutions wielded power in national politics. Democratization processes were marked by the residual fear of state terror since infamous military torturers and assassins remained in positions

of power. The military's past equation of political opposition with "subversion" continued to impede popular participation.

Despite lingering fears, however, large sectors of society were not willing to simply 'forgive and forget.' After the terrible toll of the massive repression, important sectors of the Latin American public were pro-democracy and very much aware of human rights issues. A deep need for justice boiled just beneath the surface. In a number of countries, families had filed thousands of habeas corpus claims with the courts during the dictatorships. After the armed forces left government, families filed lawsuits against officers who had carried out torture and disappearance (Frey, 2009) Yet the human rights movements and social organizations that were instrumental in challenging the military regimes were often marginalized after the transitions (Bickford, 2000).

Some new civilian leaders feared military coups; some were themselves conservative and unfriendly to popular movements. The example of Argentina spurred particularly pessimistic assessments of the latent military threat. Alfonsín had been responding to the demands arising from Argentine society for truth and justice, along with its growing rejection of military denials and decrees imposing impunity. The Madres of the Plaza de Mayo had become the conscience of the country; human rights leader Adolfo Pérez Esquivel had received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1980; other human rights organizations were actively pressing for trials and accountability. The crimes of the dictatorship had become known worldwide through the work of the government-appointed Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas (CONADEP) and NGOs, including Centro de Estudios Sociales y Legales (CELS), SERPAJ, the Madres and Abuelas of the Plaza de Mayo, and others, as well as international bodies. But the four military uprisings—insisting on impunity among other demands—restored a sense of frustration and fear in society. In Peru, civil society—particularly human rights organizations and victims' groups—played a crucial role in demanding accountability, for justice as well as truth (Burt, 2009). But their efforts did not succeed for more than 15 years. In Uruguay, Julio María Sanguinetti, the first president after the transition to civilian rule, was antagonistic to the movement for justice

and accountability, considering it disruptive and destabilizing. The Ley de Caducidad effectively stopped judicial processes in Uruguay. In short, in the 1980s the efforts of human rights groups, lawyers, unions, grassroots organizations, and families and friends of the victims were central in fighting impunity and demanding justice, but states often overrode their activities (Méndez & Mariezcurrena, 1999).

Academic and Legal Debates in the 1980s

The voluminous academic literature on transitions of the 1980s was quite conservative about the prospects for holding human rights abusers accountable in the region. Many transitions scholars argued that elite pacts were the best route to redemocratization, viewing the phenomenon of impunity as a necessary, if possibly unpleasant, cost of transition from military rule (Huntington, 1984; Karl & Schmitter, 1991; O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986; Zalaquett, 1992). Demands by civil society were considered counterproductive. Stability was judged to take precedence over justice. New civilian governments were considered too fragile to implement accountability measures; military forces had to be appeased to prevent possible new coups. The claims of those who had suffered most during the dictatorships had to be muted in the interests of stability or “reconciliation.” As Juan Méndez observed, all too often in the early literature scholars adopted minimalist approaches to the question, with expectations that were entirely too limited regarding the possibilities for new democracies to hold abusers accountable (Méndez, 1997). He and Javier Mariezcurrena (1999) argued,

On many occasions—based either on an application of Max Weber’s *ethics of responsibility* or on the false argument that criminal cases are inspired by the desire for revenge—influential Latin American and North American intellectuals have maintained that to ensure governance of the transition to democracy, those responsible for massive human rights violations should not be submitted to judicial proceedings... The statement that truth promotes reconciliation while judicial proceedings are vindictive is conceptually and historically incorrect. (p. 93)

Moreover, when human rights violations reach the level of crimes against humanity, they cannot be ignored without severe damage to the fragile system of international law and human rights, built painstakingly since the crimes of the Nazi regime were condemned after World War II. As Méndez (1997) argued, existing law established the state's duty to sanction human rights crimes.

Many binding norms of international law point in the direction of an obligation to overcome impunity for crimes of this kind [massive and systematic violations of the most basic rights to life, liberty, and physical integrity]. The Genocide Convention establishes the obligation to punish. The more recent Torture Convention obliges its signatories to make torture punishable within their domestic jurisdictions, to arrest suspected torturers, to extradite them to other jurisdictions or to prosecute them, and to cooperate fully with the prosecuting jurisdiction in the gathering and preservation of evidence. Other conventions and customary norms rule on the inapplicability of statutes of limitations to crimes against humanity, on the inapplicability of the "political offense" defense against extradition for such crimes, and on universal jurisdiction to prosecute them. (p. 260)

Judicial prosecutions and sentences provide redress, reparation, and recognition to the victims, fortify the independence of judicial systems, make clear that the atrocities of the past were serious crimes, enhance a democratic culture, and deepen citizen commitment to the democratic regime. Significant evidence suggests that human rights violators see the concession of impunity for crimes of the past as a license to repeat them or to act against the constitutional authority. The weight of the law is also crucial to counteract decades of military denials of pre-meditated atrocities as a strategy of the state.

The NGO Coalition Against Impunity

In 1987 a few NGO representatives in New York came together to discuss how to support efforts against impunity ongoing in Latin America, given the recent wave of exculpatory laws, amnesties, and military self-pardons in the region. Representatives were gravely concerned by the model of

“democratization via impunity” and sought to support and amplify the voices of Latin American human rights groups opposing impunity. After organizing a well-attended meeting in New York, several NGOs decided to form the NGO Coalition Against Impunity. The Coalition outlined three aims: 1) to work to strengthen or expand international law to counteract the spreading trend of impunity; 2) to politically dispute claims that democratization was served by these methods, when in fact impunity weakened democracy and the principle of impartial and equal justice; and 3) to bring national and international attention to the phenomenon of impunity and be a voice for peoples victimized by it (NGO Coalition Against Impunity, 1989). Coalition members believed that international human rights covenants were dangerously undermined by impunity, that the right of the victims to justice and to moral or legal reparation was being negated, and that terrible crimes were being swept under the rug, with disturbing consequences for new democracies.

The Coalition took action on several fronts. In 1987-88 it drafted a position paper on impunity and a draft letter on impunity for the U.N. Commission on Human Rights. The letter and working paper were sent to human rights organizations and advocates in Latin America and worldwide for comments and endorsement. The letter evoked excellent responses. In a July 1987 letter to Sanguinetti, PEN American Center president, Susan Sontag, and chair of PEN’s Freedom-To-Write Committee, Rose Styron, wrote to express concern about Uruguay’s amnesty law. They urged the Uruguayan government to protect access to lawful proceedings for writers who had been victims of state repression and criticized the new amnesty law for precluding legal inquiries and “releasing from accountability those guilty of censorship and torture” (PEN American Center, 1987). Also, in July the International Human Rights Law Group wrote to the Coalition to express its support for the proposal to organize a tribunal on impunity via the International League for the Rights and Liberation of Peoples (Gartner, 1987). In 1988, the Humanitarian Law Project wrote to the Coalition to endorse its effort to stop impunity, responding to a notice in the newsletter of the Guatemala Scholars Network. The notice, submitted by the Coalition, had asked for signatories for its document to the Commission on Human Rights “requesting that this topic be

put on the Commission's agenda and suggesting specific actions from the U.N. and the international community" (Humanitarian Law Project, 1988).

The Coalition letter, dated January 29, 1988, was finally sent to the Commission on Human Rights' 1988 session in Geneva, signed by 50 organizations, two Nobel prize laureates, and other human rights advocates. Along with its call for study of, and specific action against, impunity, the letter asked the Commission to consider the Latin American Federation of Associations for Relatives of Detained-Disappeared (FEDEFAM) proposed Covenant to make "disappearance" a crime against humanity equal to torture. It must be recalled that in the late 1980s, disappearance was not yet considered a crime against humanity.¹⁰

Key Coalition Steering Committee members, who signed various documents, included Rev. Oscar Bolioli, a leader of the Uruguayan Methodist Church; Raúl Molina, World University Service-Guatemala; Sister Bernadette Desmond, ECO-Andes; Bill Felice, International League for the Rights and Liberation of Peoples; Carlos Varela, New York Committee Pro-Referendum in Uruguay; Rev. David Kalke, International Association against Torture. and Patti McSherry, World University Service-U.S.

The Coalition's work was reaffirmed by a broad range of human rights organizations in Latin America and leaders such as Loyola Guzmán, Bolivian founder of FEDEFAM. The Guatemalan Human Rights Commission in Mexico, the Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, the Brazilian Conference of Bishops, Servicio Paz y Justicia (SERPAJ)-Argentina and SERPAJ Brazil; the Indian Treaty Council, and the Haitian Center for Human Rights all endorsed the Coalition's initiatives. The Coalition's collaborators also included Ronald Hoenes, and Santiago Herrarte, Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo-Guatemala, Linn

¹⁰ The International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance finally entered into force in 2010. See Office of the United Nations, High Commissioner for Human Rights, International Convention at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-convention-protection-all-persons-enforced>; see also Office of the United Nations, High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances" at <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/FactSheet6Rev3.pdf>; Finucane, 2010.

Shapiro, Friends of CODEPU (Corporación de Promoción y Defensa de los Derechos del Pueblo, Chile) and members of the Catholic, Methodist, and Lutheran churches.

In January 1988, the Coalition entered into discussions in Geneva with Javier Giraldo from the Colombian chapter of the International League about organizing a continental tribunal on impunity and combining efforts. In February, the Coalition wrote to FEDEFAM to express its unconditional support for its work at the U.N. and its sponsorship of a draft resolution to declare enforced disappearance a crime against humanity. “There is a pressing need for legislation on this issue, given the staggering numbers of persons who have been ‘disappeared’ over the past decade,” the Coalition wrote. “We believe there should be an international convention on the crime of ‘disappearance’... Feel free to add our endorsement” (NGO Coalition Against Impunity, 1988a). The Coalition prepared a Statement of Concern in March 1988 on the practice of disappearance and its links to impunity and made several suggestions for a proposed convention.

The Coalition’s statement on impunity was backed by leaders of accredited NGOs at the session of the Commission on Human Rights in Geneva (as a coalition of NGOs, the Coalition lacked consultative status and had to look for sponsors among accredited NGOs). The letter was entered as an official document to the Commission as E/CN.4/1988/NGO/51. The Coalition had met with, and enlisted the support of, numerous NGOs at this session. A number of NGOs made strong statements before the Commission regarding the negative impact of impunity on human rights, justice, and democratization. The Coalition also presented the letter to the Chair of the Commission, as well as the U.N. Centre of Human Rights, and to several interested country delegations. In sum, at this session the Coalition introduced the issue of impunity to the U.N. It was the first NGO organization whose sole focus and mission was to oppose impunity and whose goal was to spur U.N. action on the issue. In an April 1988 letter to its contacts, the Coalition wrote:

The Steering Committee feels the first stage of our work has thus been very effective. We have introduced the impunity issue to the U.N., and we have consolidated an important group of concerned

organizations and individuals, including yourselves. We have now developed a strategy for 1988-89, which will further strengthen our efforts and, we hope, put the issue of impunity firmly on the international agenda. (NGO Coalition Against Impunity, 1988b).

In the fall of 1988, Coalition representatives attended two international meetings in Buenos Aires. One concerned the drafting of an international convention on the crime of disappearance, and the other was to organize a Tribunal on impunity in Latin America under the auspices of the International League for the Rights and Liberation of Peoples. The latter planning meeting was attended by delegates from Haiti, Peru, Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, Brazil, Guatemala, Chile, the U.S., and Uruguay. The Coalition Steering Committee took responsibility to discuss the role of the U.S. vis-a-vis impunity in the region at the upcoming Tribunal. A Coalition representative also attended the FEDEFAM congress in Bogotá, where impunity was a major theme.

Also, that fall, the Coalition submitted another statement of concern regarding the crime of disappearance to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States (OAS) and to the U.N. Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances. The Coalition stated, "we have dedicated special attention to the crime of disappearance, because we believe that it encompasses other crimes: abduction, clandestine imprisonment, torture, murder, and harassment of relatives of the victims" (NGO Coalition Against Impunity, 1989b). The U.N. General Assembly declared the practice of disappearance a crime against humanity in 1992 in its "Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance," adopted in resolution 47/133 of December 18, 1992. The "Inter-American Convention on the Forced Disappearance of Persons" was adopted on June 9, 1994.

In November 1988, the Coalition wrote a detailed letter to the Secretary General (SG) of the U.N., Javier Pérez de Cuellar, summarizing its work and explaining its concerns with impunity as a threat to the system of international human rights law (Letter to the Secretary-General, reproduced in

“About the Coalition,” 1989b). The letter challenged the model of “democracy via impunity” and expressed the Coalition’s:

profound concern for the spreading trend of granting impunity to violators of human rights in some countries where peoples have lived under repression, whether from the regime or from forces which have not been controlled by elected governments... We believe that at the international level, only the United Nations has the moral authority to halt and reverse this practice, and we urge it to act with the greatest possible speed... Democracy must mean, fundamentally, accountability to the people. (Letter to the Secretary-General, reproduced in “About the Coalition,” 1989b)

The Secretary General was asked to take up the issue of impunity urgently and contribute his efforts to counteracting it. This letter was signed by some 500 distinguished individuals and NGOs in the global human rights movement.¹¹

The letter to the Secretary General noted the importance of the previous work of Special Rapporteur Louis Joinet, who in 1985 had prepared an initial study on amnesty laws for the consideration of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities (Joinet, 1987). The Coalition also noted the crucial work being done by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch on the issue of disappearances and other human rights crimes. The letter specifically asked the SG: a) To appoint an expert on human rights to study the practice of impunity, and its consequences, with respect to human rights and the building of democracy; b) to discuss the problem in the U.N. in his official address on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; c) to introduce the problem of impunity to the agenda of the 43rd session of the General Assembly; d) to request the specialized bodies of the U.N., such as the Commission on Human Rights, the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, and the Working Groups and Special

¹¹ It should be noted that the strategy of the Coalition to gather endorsements was a novelty within the U.N. at the time, and not always well-accepted, even by one or two NGO representatives.

Rapporteurs, to study the problem in depth; and e) To take any other action, within his jurisdiction, to support efforts to prevent the continued practice of impunity. The letter was signed by several Steering Committee members of the Coalition: Esmeralda Brown, U.N. Office of the United Methodist Church; Sister Bernadette Desmond, ECO-Andes; Bill Felice, U.N. Representative of the International League for the Rights and Liberation of Peoples; Patti McSherry, World University Service-U.S., and Rev. William Wipfler, Human Rights Office of the U.S. National Council of Churches.

Coalition representatives met with U.N. Under-Secretary General Jan Martensen in November 1988, to present him with a Coalition document on impunity. In December 1988, distinguished human rights leaders signed a new letter of support for the Coalition's work and urged the chair and the secretary of the Commission on Human Rights to circulate the Coalition's letter to Pérez de Cuellar as an official document. This letter was signed by Adolfo Pérez Esquivel of SERPAJ, Nigel Hartley of WUS-International, and Loyola Guzmán of the Federación de Familiares de Detenidos-Desaparecidos (FEDEFAM) (World University Service, Letter to Commission on Human Rights, 23 December, 1988). That same year Theo Van Boven, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Restitution, Compensation and Reparations for Gross and Consistent Violations of Human Rights, wrote a letter of support for the work of the Coalition. Members of the Steering Committee also visited Elsa Stamatopoulou, director of the U.N. Human Rights Centre in New York, in 1989, to present the letter (Personal records of author). In March of 1989 the Asociación Pro Derechos Humanos of Spain wrote to Pérez de Cuellar re-stating and supporting the specific calls for action urged by the Coalition (Asociación Pro Derechos Humanos, Letter to Secretary-General, 15 March 1989). The struggle against impunity had built a notable momentum and enlisted the support of a wide range of organizations and human rights leaders worldwide.

The Coalition addressed a new letter to Fatma Zohra Ksentini of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities in February 1989 expressing its concerns:

The Coalition, which was formed last year to focus the attention of the international human rights community on that disturbing approach to the democratization process, strongly questions its stated purpose and is deeply alarmed at its legal, social and political consequences... On June 22, 1988, we sent a communication to the Sub-Commission suggesting, among other things, the adoption of a resolution, pointing out the need to prevent the granting of impunity to violators of human rights, and the appointment of an expert or group of experts to study the consequences for human rights of impunity laws. (NGO Coalition Against Impunity, 1989a)

At the Commission's 45th session in Geneva in 1989, the Coalition was again present, acting in favor of concrete steps by the U.N. to combat impunity. That year the Coalition's statement was again circulated as an official document as E/CN.4/1989/NGO/66 (see Annex).

In 1990 the Coalition testified before the U.N. Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances in New York on "The Question of Sanctions for Military Violators of Human Rights." In 1991 the Coalition addressed the Non-Governmental Organizations Consultation, formed in preparation for the 1993 U.N. World Conference on Human Rights, and spoke on "The Problem of Impunity for Violators of Human Rights." Also in 1991, the Coalition attended the Geneva meetings of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights once more, and a new document ("Written statement/submitted by World University Service on behalf of the Coalition Against Impunity and its NGO members") was circulated on the problem of impunity (World University Service, NGO Coalition Against Impunity, 1991).

During this time the Coalition, along with human rights and other NGOs in the United States, Europe, and Latin America, moved forward with tribunals, a form of popular, public human rights education to raise awareness of the ramifications of impunity. Many of these events were carried out under the auspices of the International League for the Rights and Liberation of Peoples, headquartered in Italy and with chapters in various countries. Tribunals on impunity were held between 1989 and 1991 in 12 Latin American countries in preparation for the continental session. In November 1991, a Permanent People's Tribunal on Impunity for Crimes Against Humanity in Latin

America was held in Bogotá, with delegates from many countries, to present a picture of impunity in Latin America as a whole. A panel of distinguished judges heard the testimonies and analyses (see Annex). These civil society efforts were crucial contributions in the fight against impunity, allowing victims to tell their stories and raising awareness internationally and locally.

By the early 1990s, impunity was recognized as a major human rights issue in the United Nations, the Inter-American system, and the international human rights movement. In 1990, the Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances issued a substantial report that repeatedly referenced the issue of impunity and analyzed its characteristics, especially in sections 18 through 24 (U.N. Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances, 1990). To quote some key passages,

18. Local, regional and international non-governmental organizations also submitted reports about the general framework within which enforced or involuntary disappearances took place in each country. As in the past, one of the most serious problems set forth concerned the de facto impunity enjoyed by those responsible for disappearance... That the culprits would be exempt from punishment for their actions contributed, in the estimation of these reports, to the continuing occurrence of disappearances.

24. The Working Group noted with interest the organization of a Tribunal Permanente de los Pueblos, a body concerned with the problem of impunity. (pp. 5-6)

The Working Group also explained that it had examined draft resolutions on disappearance submitted by NGOs. After providing an incisive analysis of disappearance as a crime, the Working Group stated:

344. Perhaps the single most important factor contributing to the phenomenon of disappearances may be that of impunity. The Working Group's experience over the past ten years has confirmed the age-old adage that impunity breeds contempt for the law. Perpetrators of human rights violations, whether civilian or military, will become all the more brazen when they are not held to account before a court of law. (p. 84)

U.N. bodies increasingly analyzed the issue of impunity and mechanisms to end it in their documents and studies, and within U.N. policy and international law. By decision 1991/110, adopted at its 43rd session, the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities requested that El Hadji Guissé and Louis Joinet draft a working paper examining in depth the question of the impunity of perpetrators of violations of human rights, as the Coalition had urged. In 1993, the U.N. Commission on Human Rights approved their preliminary study in resolution E/CN.4/RES/1993/43, "Question of the impunity of perpetrators of violations of human rights," stating that "although action to combat impunity has its roots in the need for justice, it cannot be reduced to the sole objective of punishing the guilty" (p. 7). According to the study, there were three requirements: punishing those responsible, satisfying the victim's right to know and obtain redress, and enabling the authorities to fulfill their mandate as the public body that guarantees law and order. The report made clear the affirmative duty of states to prosecute human rights abuses. In 1992, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights ruled the amnesty laws of Argentina and Uruguay were inconsistent with those states' human rights obligations (Binder, 2011).

Theo Van Boven, the Special Rapporteur, issued a fundamental report, "Study concerning the right to restitution, compensation and rehabilitation for victims of gross violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms" in 1993 (Commission on Human Rights, 1993). Between 1986 and 1991, when he was the U.N.'s Special Rapporteur, Van Boven and Cherif Bassiouni drafted the "U.N. Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law." These guidelines adopted a victim-oriented perspective and made clear their right to a remedy under law. This policy paper was adopted by the U.N. General Assembly in 2005, enshrining victims' rights in the world (U.N. High Commissioner of Human Rights, 2014). In 1996, Louis Joinet presented an expanded final report: "Question of impunity of perpetrators of violations of human rights (civil and political rights)" (Joinet, 1996). In sum, these U.N. studies were pathbreaking policy documents clearly committing the U.N. to the struggle

against impunity, thereby shaping the evolving system of international law and human rights norms.

Conclusion

After four intense years of work, the Coalition ceased to function in 1991. Steering Committee members found themselves with new commitments and responsibilities. Moreover, the movement against impunity began to pass from families of the disappeared and human rights organizations to the realm of lawyers and professional experts, who took up the task of developing and codifying new concepts in international law. In retrospect, the work of the NGO Coalition was remarkably successful. Its original goals were met. International organizations, including the U.N. and the Inter-American organizations, began to take steps to overcome impunity. A multitude of new civil society organizations emerged. A quick internet search today reveals thousands of links to organizations (including others called “Coalition Against Impunity”), articles, books, and campaigns on impunity. A whole new academic specialization, transitional justice, appeared.

The United Nations and the OAS delved deeply into the consequences of impunity and explored the impact of impunity on civilian populations, on young democracies, on the rule of law, and on human rights. In the 1990s and 2000s, the U.N. took crucial strides to combat impunity. The U.N. created the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in 1993 and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in 1994 following the genocide in that country. The creation of these tribunals further convinced many of the need for a permanent international criminal court. In 1998 Pinochet was arrested in London, under universal jurisdiction, for serious human rights crimes. This was a significant milestone in international law; it was also breathtaking because Pinochet had been an anticommunist ally of the U.S. during the Cold War. That same year, the Rome Statute authorized the creation of the International Criminal Court to focus on mass crimes committed against civilian populations.

This forward momentum was suddenly halted by the terrible attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. The Bush administration

declared ‘the war on terror’ and the world entered a dark period of war, torture, rendition, ‘black sites,’ and indefinite detention. Despite this setback to human rights, the International Criminal Court was established in 2002 after a long process of discussion among states. It accepted cases regarding serious crimes against humanity and war crimes (International Criminal Court, n.d.). Strengthened international law, new institutions, and fortified legal instruments established new standards regarding the state’s obligation to provide accountability and redress for victims of widespread human rights abuses. A global shift in terms of norms and standards regarding impunity was taking place.

Especially in the 2000s, impunity laws were declared unconstitutional in a number of Latin American countries, including Argentina, Uruguay, and El Salvador. Argentina held mega-trials of human rights abusers, including perpetrators from Operation Condor, charting new legal ground. The Condor trial marked the first judicial proceeding that considered Operation Condor as a transnational system. The Inter-American Commission for Human Rights and the Inter-American Court for Human Rights began to issue decisions upholding the state’s obligation to prosecute grave violations of human rights (for a critique of the role of the Inter-American system see Dykmann, 2007). Nevertheless, in other countries military-security forces are still shielded from prosecution, and governments have done little to dismantle entrenched structures of impunity. Many families still endure the anguish of not knowing what happened to their disappeared loved ones. The struggle to end impunity is ongoing, and central to this struggle is the necessity to expand human rights awareness and action through education, memory sites, and consciousness-raising. There is an urgent need for public education systems to incorporate study of human rights and recent history—a task that has proven difficult in Latin America due to its controversial nature (Lowy, 2022; Magendzo & Toledo, 2019)—as a key part of the effort to never again accept national security justifications for massive human rights violations. As U.N. bodies have stated, no circumstances ever justify torture or disappearance (Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, 1984). The expansion of human rights education and awareness in the U.S. is urgently necessary as well, given that many

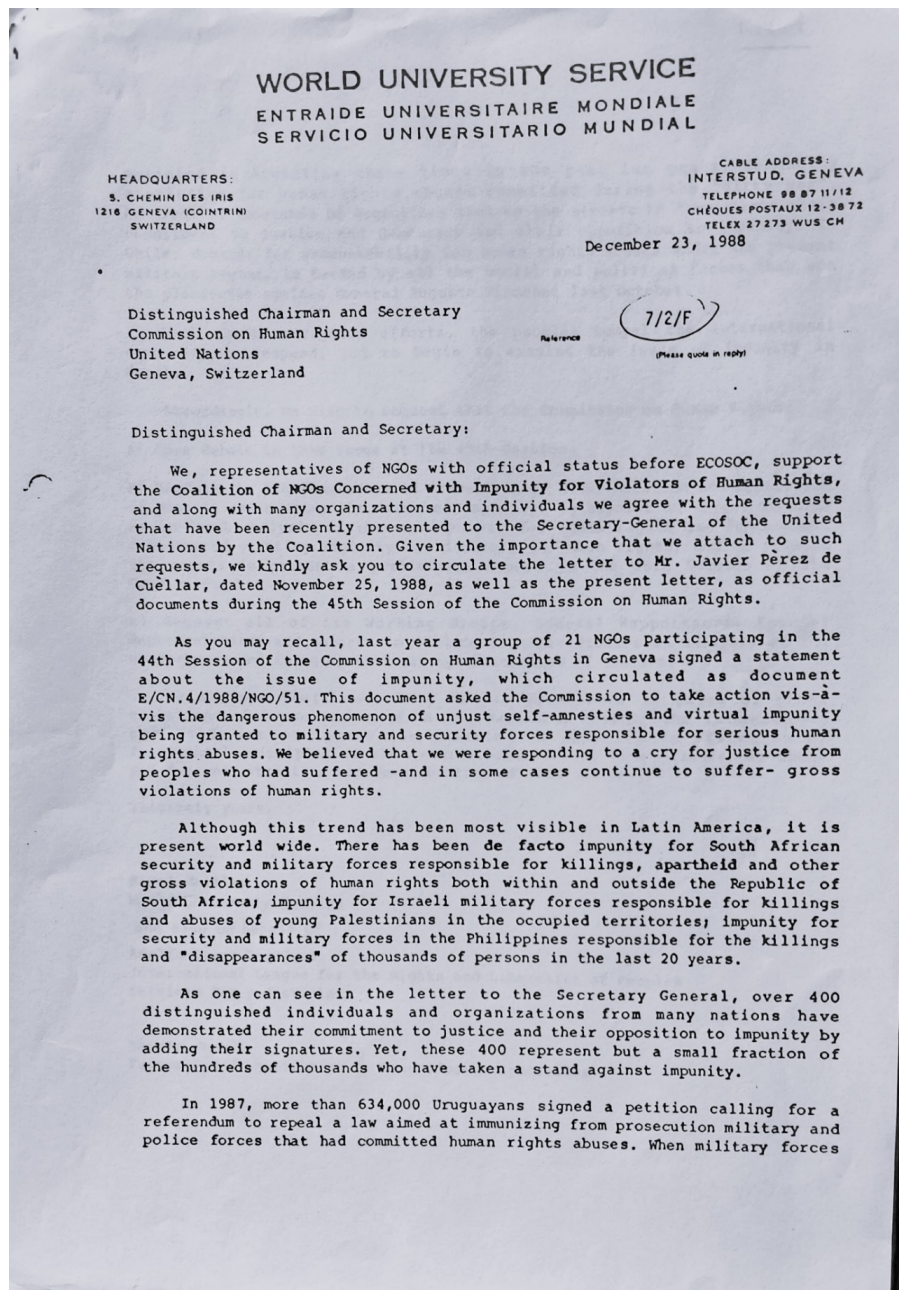
students have little idea of the history of U.S. support for Latin American dictatorships.

The Coalition, along with many other human rights advocates and organizations, believed that overcoming impunity was a central element of the struggle for justice and the deepening and consolidation of democracy. History has shown that the worst pessimistic predictions—of military coups and destabilization following efforts against impunity—did not come to pass. Political scientists have critiqued in recent years the ‘elite pact’ theories of the 1980s (for a review of that literature see McSherry, 2012). The upholding of human rights continues to advance, slowly but surely, a crucial change in Latin America and elsewhere.

The case of the NGO Coalition Against Impunity and its partner NGOs demonstrates the incremental democratization of the U.N. in two ways. First, NGOs, channeling the concerns and demands of large numbers of people, directly influenced the U.N. system to act regarding impunity. Existing protections were strengthened, and new protections codified into law in cases where civilian populations were subjected to massive, illegal forms of repression. Second, in such cases the U.N. was taking a human rights position that directly conflicted with the policies of particular states, which sought to nullify or ‘forget’ massive crimes committed in the recent past. That is, despite the state-centric nature of the U.N., the organization took a strong stance regarding the right of peoples to be protected from extralegal methods of state repression and consequent impunity. The national security states and their methods were implicitly challenged and condemned. In sum, this case raises hopes that over time, the voices of the world’s people increasingly will be considered even when they conflict with the priorities and justifications of states.

Annex A


1988 letter from World University Service-International presenting Coalition calls for UN action



Annex B

Official 1989 UN document based on Coalition letter

UNITED
NATIONS

 **Economic and Social
Council**

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.4/1989/NGO/66
28 February 1989

Original: ENGLISH

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Forty-fifth session
Agenda item 12

QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS
IN ANY PART OF THE WORLD, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO COLONIAL
AND OTHER DEPENDENT COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES

Written statement submitted by the Disabled Peoples' International,
the International Indian Treaty Council, the Latin American
Federation of Associations of Relatives of Disappeared Detainees,
Service, Justice and Peace in Latin America and the World University
Service, non-governmental organizations in consultative status
(category II)

The Secretary-General has received the following communication which
is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council
resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[24 February 1989]

GE.89-15796/1932A

Annex C

Judges for Permanent People's Tribunal on Impunity, Bogotá, 1991: Victoria Abellán (Spain), Richard Bäümlin (Switzerland), Giulio Girardi (Italy), François Houtart (Belgium), Fabiola Letelier (Chile), Sergio Méndez Arceo (Mexico), Ward Morehouse (U.S.), Vilma Núñez (Nicaragua), Adolfo Pérez Esquivel (Argentina), John Quigley (U.S.).

Author photo



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