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1-1-2003

Court Review: Volume 39, Issue 4 - President's Column

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Halligan, Francis X. Jr., "Court Review: Volume 39, Issue 4 - President's Column" (2003). *Court Review: The Journal of the American Judges Association.* Paper 124.
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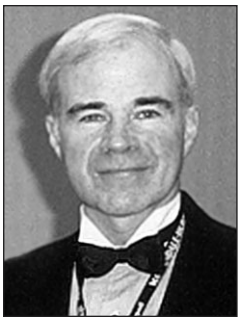
President's Column

Francis X. Halligan, Jr.

Upon assuming the presidency of the American Judges Association at the 2002 Annual Conference in Maui, I indicated that it was one of my goals for the AJA to have a greater participation in the activities of the United Nations. We have an association with the U.N. as a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) affiliate.

As you know, the U.N. headquarters is located at 47th Street and 1st Avenue in Manhattan, now know as United Nations Plaza. There are six main, interconnected structures comprising the New York headquarters, which is bordered by the East River. There are also other buildings adjacent to the headquarters that house other U.N. offices, including the Pass Office, the UNICEF House, the FF Building, and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.



During my tenure as AJA president, I have attended meetings at the United Nations on several occasions. Prior to entering the U.N., you must obtain a pass to enable you to enter the grounds and buildings. Before my trips, I contacted the NGO Resource Center, requesting that they make arrangements through the Pass Office for the issuance of a pass. Security at the site has been increased as a result of recent world events. Those wishing to enter the facilities must fill out a detailed questionnaire, present several forms of identification, and be photographed. Once a pass is issued, which bears your photograph, it must be worn at all times while on the premises.

On one of my first trips to the headquarters, I met with Louis Delgadillo, who works within the United Nations at the NGO Resource Center in the Department of Public Information (DPI). When I first met with him, he informed me of the planning that was in progress for the 56th Annual DPI/NGO Conference, which was to be held September 8-10, 2003 at the United Nations. The theme of the conference was Human Security and Dignity: Fulfilling the Promise of the United Nations. After reviewing the materials for the conference, I thought it would provide an excellent opportunity both to interact and meet with other NGO members. I was not disappointed.

Since its founding, the United Nations has always played an important role in the affairs of nations, but perhaps never more so than now. The U.N. has traditionally served as a meeting place for the countries of the world to both confer and mediate disputes that occasionally arise between member states. As this column was being written, the General Assembly of the United Nations is in session. The leaders of the world have been addressing the General Assembly, including President George Bush of the United States. Many of the speeches have addressed the issue of armed conflicts around the globe. The longstanding alliances between the United States and some of its oldest allies, such as France, are now being tested as a result of the United States involvement in Iraq. The interest of the world community in the proceedings of the U.N. has never been greater.

The annual conference began with an opening plenary session that was conducted in the General Assembly Hall on September 8. The session was called to order and welcoming speeches were then provided by various officials of the United Nations, including Kofi A. Annan, the U.N. Secretary General, and by the NGO officials. In addition to the plenary sessions, numerous workshops were conducted, enabling those in attendance to participate in programs that were of special interest to them. The afternoon session that was conducted on the first day was entitled, "Psychological Aspects of Human Security and Dignity." The second day sessions were entitled, "Educating for a Secure Future," and, "From Oppression to Empowerment." Actor Danny Glover, who has been involved with the U.N. for many years, moderated the second session. On September 10, the last day of the conference, the sessions were entitled, "Sustainable Development in the Context of Globalization," and "A Conversation with Eminent Persons on Global Trends and Strategies."

On Monday, September 8, I attended the conference reception, as did many of the individuals who had registered for the conference. At this reception, I was fortunate enough to both meet and briefly speak with the Secretary General, Kofi A. Annan. It was both an honor and a pleasure to meet this man. He surely has one of the most difficult jobs in the world today. My participation in the conference was both educational and rewarding. It is my sincere hope that our association continues to participate in the United Nations through our affiliation as an NGO.