

Acceptance Statement – George Edwards (1 August 2008) (Ron Brown Award)

**Acceptance Statement of George E. Edwards
(Ronald Harmon Brown Award)
1 August 2008**

I would like to thank the National Bar Association leadership, all NBA members at this Banquet, and NBA members who are not present in Houston tonight—I guess that includes me—as I am now in transit from Vientiane, Laos to Bangkok, Thailand on a trip to lecture on international human rights law, transnational education, and “knowledge as power”.

I regret that I cannot be with you tonight in person, but am heartened that Dr. Beverly Baker Kelly is with you to accept this award on my behalf.

When I think of the Ronald Harmon Brown Award, of course I think of the great contributions that Ron Brown made to all of us in the United States, and to people all over the world during his life—that was cut all too short.

I also think of the stated purposes of the National Bar Association, and the goals of the NBA International Law Section.

These goals include:

- To improve the administration of justice;
- To preserve the independence of the judiciary;
- To promote cooperation among members of the US and international bars;
- To improve the economic condition of all US citizens, regardless of race, sex or creed;
- To help secure the free franchise guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution; and
- To protect human rights.

In furthering these goals, the NBA, through the International Law Section and other Sections, has faced many challenges. Nevertheless, the NBA has achieved many goals, including those related to human rights.

I am proud that the NBA has permitted me to be a part of its noble efforts to promote and protect international human rights, not only in the United States, but around the world. The NBA has had a vibrant, rich presence in the global arena for over many years, and has many accomplishments. I'll mention just a few accomplishments that were supported by the NBA-International Law Section. The NBA-ILS...

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- Sent NBA-ILS delegates to the 1998 United Nations Diplomatic Conference at Rome that established the International Criminal Court (ICC) (which this past month issued an arrest warrant against the President of Sudan for international crimes in Darfur);
- Sent NBA-ILS delegates to the United Nations World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South African in 2001 to help draft the World Conference Declaration;
- Sent an NBA-ILS delegation to New York for the United Nations Forum on Forests, to help negotiate an agreement to protect the global environment;
- Sent an NBA-ILS delegation to a World Bank Conference in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia;
- In 2006, the NBA-ILS presented an 89-page Human Rights Report to the United Nations Human Rights Committee in Geneva, detailing the US government's violations of human rights before, during and after Hurricane Katrina—in violation of a US Treaty & US law;
- In 2008, the NBA-ILS presented a 94-page Human Rights Report to the UN Race Committee in Geneva, that highlighted the U.S. Government's continued failure to respect, protect, and fulfill the human rights of people who suffered because of Hurricane Katrina;
- Sent NBA-ILS delegates to various sessions of the UN Human Rights Commission, the UN Human Rights Council, UN Treaty Bodies, and other UN Bodies;
- Had an NBA-ILS member serve as Deputy Registrar of the UN International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda;
- Sent NBA-ILS delegates on election-watching missions in various countries;
- Participated in countless conferences, workshops, and seminars, in many different countries;
- Currently, the NBA-ILS is working with students from Indiana and from Moi University in Eldoret, Kenya, to prepare a UN report about torture perpetrated in Kenya. This report will be submitted later this year to the UN Committee Against Torture.

The list of NBA-ILS accomplishments and contributions goes on. We have made great strides towards ensuring human rights and the rule of law.

But, much more needs to be done.

I call on other NBA members present in Houston tonight, and NBA members not present, to join with the International Law Section to promote and protect human rights.

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You may ask, what can I contribute—as a lawyer, judge, law professor, law student or other legal professional who doesn't have a background in international law or international human rights law.

There is plenty you (and we) can do.

- You can join the NBA-International Law Section.
- You can join an election-watching or other human rights mission.
- You can help draft reports submitted to the United Nations.
- Of course, you can always help by checking citations...or proofreading NBA-ILS submissions—or you can volunteer your students or your junior associates for these tasks!

Human rights protections begin with knowledge:

- Knowledge about *what our rights are*
- Knowledge about *who is responsible for ensuring our rights are not violated*
- Knowledge about *what steps to take when our rights are violated*
- Knowledge about *how our human rights are to be enforced*.

Knowledge = Power.

Power is meaningless, unless we Take Action.

I call on you to Take Action...to continue to help our voices be heard in our own backyards, and around the globe. To continue to promote and protect human rights.

Much of my own international human rights law work has been through and with the NBA-International Law Section. Thus, the Ronald Harmon Brown Award might appropriately be given to the NBA-ILS, rather than to me.

I am thankful for the opportunity I have had to participate in all the wonderful contributions that the NBA, particularly the International Law Section, has made in the United States and throughout the international community.