

# Castan Centre for Human Rights Law



## NEWSLETTER

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Castan Centre News	2
Defamation defender speaks out	6
The gay marriage debate	7
The long road to justice	8
Restoring Justice in Timor	12
Around the Faculty	14
The Year in Review	16

The Castan Centre was established by the Monash University Law School in 2000 as an independent, non-profit organisation committed to the protection and promotion of human rights.

Through research and public education, the centre generates innovative theoretical and practical approaches to understanding and implementing international and domestic human rights law.

### Zimbabwe Opposition Minister Visits Melbourne

His visit was kept secret until the last minute, yet Zimbabwe's Shadow Minister for Justice, David Coltart, drew hundreds to hear him speak at two Castan Centre functions in July. After hearing Coltart's story, it is not hard to understand why.

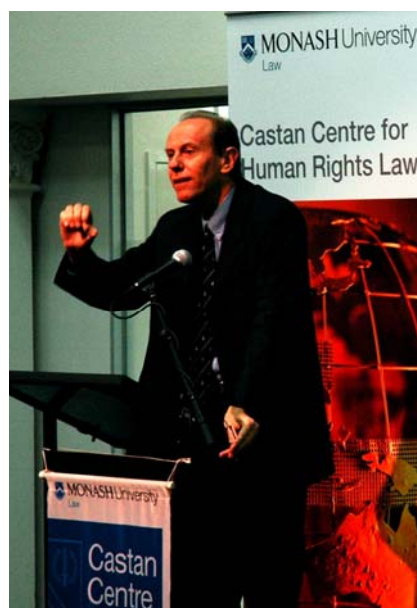
Coltart, a member of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change, was elected to parliament in June 2000 with more than 84% of the vote in his mostly poor, black electorate. Ever since he combined his studies in South Africa with his role as director of a Legal Aid Clinic in the early 1980s, Coltart has been a strong human rights advocate. In 1987, he founded the Bulawayo Legal Projects Centre in Zimbabwe, which now runs 10 legal advice clinics for the underprivileged.

During his visit, which was arranged by his old friend, the Dean of Law at Bond University, Duncan Bentley, Coltart spoke of the long history of human rights abuses by Robert Mugabe's regime. Mugabe came to power in 1980 as a hero: he had overthrown the white minority government and yet he pursued reconciliation with the white population. During this time, however, his troops conducted a campaign of torture and murder against the Ndebele people which resulted in almost 20,000 deaths – what, in the words of Coltart, “can only be described as an act of genocide”.

The latest wave of repression started in

early 2000, when Mugabe was enraged at the defeat of a referendum to increase his power. Since then, independent judges have been hounded out of office and youth brigades terrorise the populace, all as the country continues its economic tailspin. Torture and killing are routine and the most recent outrage has seen about 700,000 people deprived of their homes or market stalls in the government's “cleaning out the filth” campaign, which has demolished squatter towns.

It is against this background that Coltart visited Australia in July, speaking at universities in three states, meeting with senior politicians and giving numerous media interviews. His trip was taken at great personal risk: six of Coltart's fellow parliamentarians have been murdered in the last four years. In order to ensure his safe passage from the country, all details of his trip were kept secret until he was in South Africa and he has now returned to an uncertain future although, at the time of writing, he is safe.



David Coltart at Monash Law

As for the purpose of his visit, Coltart ended his speech at the Monash University Law Chambers with a plea. “I implore you, ladies and gentlemen, to play your part in bringing pressure to bear on the Australian government to act, and to act with urgency, so that the plight of these hundreds of thousands of Zimbabweans can be addressed”.

*An edited transcript of David's 2005 Gerard Brennan Speech to Bond University starts at page 8. The transcript of his Monash speech will be added to our website shortly.*