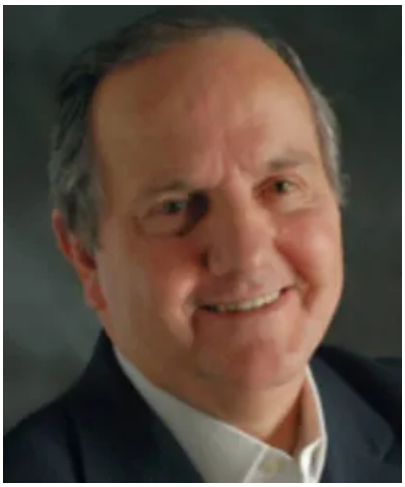
Professor Juan E. Méndez (Academic Expert)



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Profile

Juan E. Méndez is Professor of Human Rights Law in Residence at the Washington College of Law, The American University and the author – with Marjory Wentworth – of Taking a Stand: The Evolution of Human Rights (New York and London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011). Beginning Nov. 1, 2010 and until October 31, 2016, he served as the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. In the summer of 2009 he was a Scholar-in-Residence at the Ford Foundation in New York. Between 2004 and 2009 he was President of the International Center for Transitional Justice. Starting in August 2004 and until March 31, 2007, he was also concurrently the Special Advisor to the Secretary General of the UN on the Prevention of Genocide. In 2010 and 2011 he was Co-Chair of the Human Rights Institute of the International Bar Association. A native of Lomas de Zamora, Argentina, Mr. Méndez has dedicated his legal career to the defense of human rights and has a long and distinguished record of advocacy throughout the Americas. As a result of his involvement in representing political prisoners, the Argentinean military dictatorship arrested him and subjected him to torture and administrative detention for a year and a half. During this time, Amnesty International adopted him as a "Prisoner of Conscience." After being expelled from his country in 1977, Mr. Mendez settled in the United States with his family.

For 15 years, he worked with Human Rights Watch, concentrating his efforts on human rights issues in the western hemisphere, and helping to build the organization into one of the most widely respected in the world. In 1994, he became General Counsel of Human Rights Watch, with worldwide duties in support of the organization's mission, including responsibility for the organization's litigation and standard?setting activities. From 1996 to 1999, Mr. Méndez was the Executive Director of the Inter?American Institute of Human Rights in Costa Rica. Between October 1999 and May 2004 he was Professor of Law and Director of the Center for Civil and Human Rights at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana. Between 2000 and 2003 he was a member of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States, and served as President in 2002.

At the Washington College of Law he is Faculty Director of the Anti-Torture Initiative, a project of WCL's Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law. He has taught International Human Rights Law at Georgetown Law School and at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, and he teaches regularly at the Oxford Masters Program in International Human Rights Law in the United Kingdom and in the summer Human Rights Academy at American University in Washington. He holds doctorates honoris causa from the University of Quebec in Montreal (UQAM, 2007), the National University of La Plata, Argentina (2012) and the National University of Mar del Plata, Argentina (2015).

He is the recipient of several human rights awards, the most recent being the Eclipse Award by the Center for Victims of Torture (2016), the Adlai Stevenson Award of the United Nations Associations of the United States, Princeton-Trenton Chapter (December 2015), the Louis B Sohn Award by the United Nations Association of the National Capital Area (UNA-NCA) in December 2014 and the Letelier-Moffitt Human Rights Award by the Institute for Policy Studies, Washington DC, in October 2014. He has also received the Goler T. Butcher Medal from the American Society of International Law, in 2010; the inaugural "Monsignor Oscar A. Romero Award for Leadership in Service to Human Rights," by the University of Dayton in April 2000, and the "Jeanne and Joseph Sullivan Award" of the Heartland Alliance, Chicago, in May 2003.

Mr. Méndez is a member of the bar of Mar del Plata and Buenos Aires, Argentina and of the District of Columbia, U.S., having earned a J.D. from Stella Maris Catholic University in Argentina and a certificate from the American University, Washington College of Law.

His current field of practice is International Human Rights Law, with expertise in Transitional Justice, Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities, Rights of Persons Deprived of Liberty, and the Right to Personal Integrity.

Related practice areas

International Media Law
Public International Law

International Human Rights Law
International Law