



**Influential Constitutional Justice: its influence on society
and on developing a global human rights jurisprudence**

**World Conference on Constitutional Justice
Cape Town, 22 – 24 January 2009**

**organised by
the Constitutional Court of South Africa
and
the Venice Commission**

**Dinner speech by
Mr Gianni Buquicchio
Director, Secretary of the Venice Commission**

A dream has become reality

A few years ago, I had a dream that all the constitutional courts of the world would get together in one place. Today, my dream has become a reality and I am delighted to see so many courts participating in the First World Conference on Constitutional Justice.

Co-operation with the constitutional courts has been a priority for the Venice Commission since its inception, almost 20 years ago.

This year - 2009 - is a year of anniversaries: the 60th anniversary of the Council of Europe, the 50th anniversary of the European Court of Human Rights and the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Venice Commission has been co-operating with constitutional courts and has contributed to the establishment of many of these courts in Central and Eastern Europe.

We have been at the service of constitutional justice for 20 years and today, I am proud to see how much progress has been made by these courts with respect to their independence, competence and in the quality of their judgments.

Constitutional justice has increased in importance on a global level over the years as more and more countries have introduced a form of constitutional review into their systems, either through constitutional courts or through equivalent bodies.

For ideas and experiences to be shared between these courts, networks are required and I am pleased to say that more and more networks are seeing the light of day. Through its Venice Forum, the Venice Commission provides a tool which allows the networks to communicate effectively within and with other networks.

South Africa is a beautiful country, a country that is close to my heart and I am therefore very happy that the First World Conference on Constitutional Justice is taking place here, in the magnificent city of Cape Town.

Our co-operation with South Africa started just after *apartheid* and we have since worked with many partners. The most important of these is the Constitutional Court with which we started co-operating on the day of its creation, facilitated by the help of exceptional people such as Arthur Chaskalson, Pius Langa and many of the current as well as former judges.

The Constitutional Court of South Africa has confirmed its position in the world today through its case law, its jurisprudence and in particular its independence and neutrality. *May it have a long and prosperous life!*

The Venice Commission also had the pleasure of participating in the creation of the Southern African Judges Commission, seeing this co-operation extended to the southern African region.

Today, my dream has come true and I hope that this First World Conference on Constitutional Justice will be a success and a first step towards greater co-operation between courts and the organisation of similar events in the future.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank most sincerely the Constitutional Court of South Africa, the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development of South Africa as well as the South African authorities, without them this important event would not have been possible.

Please don't let me keep you any longer from enjoying this wonderful dinner, I wish you all a "bon appétit"!

Thank you.