

Top justice promotes rights

Australian court
official talks about human rights in the 21st century.

By Margaret Behm

Staff writer

The issue of human rights can be as simple as the right to write left-handed and as complicated as trying to form a worldwide legal system to protect human rights.

Michael Kirby, justice of the High Court of Australia, spoke on these issues at the Lied Center for Performing Arts on Tuesday in his speech, "Human Rights in the New Millennium."

His visit was part of the E.N. Thompson Forum on World Issues.

Jim Phelps, a senior business management major, said the speech opened his eyes to world issues.

"I thought that what he had to say was relevant to current topics in international politics and to the world today," he said.

Kirby told the audience about his brother, Donald, who was left-handed.

The teachers at Donald's school tried to get him to write right-handed by using a cane on him.

Kirby's mother responded by going to the school with a rolling pin.

She let the school know that her son was left-handed, and he was going to stay that way.

Kirby said his mother's actions helped him later, when he discovered he was gay.

Because his brother didn't change his writing style, Kirby felt

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Michael Kirby

justice of the High Court of Australia

comfortable with being gay.

Phelps said he didn't realize gay people could be victims of human rights violations.

"I never dreamed he was homosexual," he said. "I guess when you think about human rights, it's usually about people being slaughtered because of their skin color or gender. He connected it with being homosexual."

Kirby reviewed human rights violations in the past, such as in Cambodia, to give the audience an idea of the history of human rights violations.

"As we enter the new millennium, we should reflect upon the horrors of the century that just came to a close," he said.

Religious beliefs have a lot to do with human rights violations toward gay people, Kirby said.

"I never accepted that I was an evil person," he said. "But I knew that it was wrong for people to put me down or penalize me by laws and violence."

Kirby then asked which right was more important: the right to practice religion, or the right to be protected from religious persecution.

"In our world, which is bigger than us, there are different philoso-

phies," he said. "A consensus is hard to reach, but we must keep trying."

Part of this consensus will come with a worldwide legal system, Kirby said.

"The fabric of the global legal system is not yet built, but it has begun," he said.

Because everyone is connected, some countries look to international law for guidance when questions are raised.

"If they get to a statute that is ambiguous or a gap in a law, it is now generally acceptable to look to international law to fill the gap or ambiguity," he said.

The idea of what rights people should have changes as the calendar changes, Kirby said.

"We didn't think 100 years ago that the right of women to vote was a fundamental right," he said. "Now we would accept that voting is a fundamental right."

Even though children probably won't agree with their parents' decisions, the world still needs to keep moving forward, he said.

"The journey is never complete," he said.

"In 20 years, we will look back on our time and wonder why we were so blind."

Union Board elects officers

From staff reports

In its last meeting of the year, the Union Board elected new officers and set summer meeting times.

Todd Cruise was elected president and Ryan Merrill was elected vice president.

Scott Cameron was elected secretary, Joachim Nyoni was elected

public relations coordinator, and Dustin Manhart was elected membership coordinator.

The board voted to meet during the summer on July 19 at 5:30 p.m. and July 25 at 5:30 p.m.

The first meeting for the 2000-2001 school year will be Aug. 29. Meeting times for next year will remain at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesdays.

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Recruiters scour field

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But the number of recruiters and students thinned considerably in the afternoon.

Marilyn Ross, director of special education for six school districts in north central Kansas, said as of 2:30 p.m., she had not met with any students qualified for the four positions she was seeking to fill.

"There are more recruiters than people being interviewed," Ross said.

It was a common sentiment that afternoon.

Michael Luman, recruiter for the Houston Independent School District, said the 300 schools in the country's seventh-largest district will have 1,200 vacancies come fall.

But Luman said having vacancies wasn't a new phenomenon - Houston has been growing quickly. But he did say recruiting in the Midwest has proven to be less fruitful than in years past.

"Now, with teacher shortages coming here, it's getting more difficult," he said. So, to compensate, Houston has expanded its recruitment efforts to more states.

Luman said he expected some of the Houston vacancies to be filled by long-term substitute teachers.

Recruiters gave varied reasons for the teacher shortage, including low pay and attractive computer and industry jobs. Also, the teaching field is often viewed as unattractive compared with more lucrative careers, such as law and medicine.

The Nebraska Legislature passed a bill this year that creates a task force to study teacher salaries.

More than 1,000 teachers marched on the Capitol in February lobbying for a bill that would have increased teacher pay. That bill failed in committee.

DeKalb County, Ga., looking to fill 1,000 slots, boasted one of the highest beginning salaries at \$35,000, at least \$10,000 more than the average starting pay for teachers in Nebraska.

Justin Heckman, a senior secondary education major with a natural sciences endorsement, said his reason for wanting to be a teacher was simple: "I love it ... the world needs good teach-

"It's a teacher's market, for sure."