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2008-12-06 H. Thomas Wells, Jr. ABA Presidential Speech

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As president of the American Bar Association, it is a pleasure and an honor for me to join our distinguished hosts, speakers, and guests to this examination—and celebration—of the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Last month in New York City, we had a sister event to commemorate this milestone anniversary in the home city of the United Nations. I had the pleasure and honor of being there, and I'd like to recognize the efforts in organizing the event by the ABA Section of International

Law and its chair, Aaron Schildhaus, and the ABA Center for Human Rights and its co-chairs, Jerry Shestack and Steve Walther.

We also had tremendous support from the Association of the Bar of the City of New York, the Paris Bar and Bantonier Bournazel, and the Italian Bar and President Alpa—along with the leaders of dozens of the world's bars and major associations of lawyers who joined us in the commemoration.

Here in Paris—the birthplace of the Universal Declaration—I come to you

with a message from the ABA Board of Governors—which speaks on behalf of the Association's 400,000 members. The Board met just a few weeks ago and adopted the following resolution:

"Resolved, that the American Bar Association urges the U.S. and other countries to renew their commitment to the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—December 10, 1948, in Paris."

Our resolution clearly reaffirms the ABA's commitment to and work on behalf of the principles we have long espoused and defended.

Throughout the American Bar Association, policies, programs, and public advocacy support the connection between the law and human rights throughout countless areas of concern—among them are access to justice, women's and children's welfare, protection of the poor, immigration, genocide, racial discrimination, sexual orientation, capital punishment, human

**trafficking, antiterrorism surveillance
and detention, and other areas.**

**As lawyers—and more importantly, as
an independent profession that holds
governments accountable under law—we
work in the forefront of developing,
protecting, and enforcing human rights
throughout the world. The Universal
Declaration of Human Rights is our
inspiration and guidepost. It is therefore
fitting that we are acknowledging this
impressive 60th anniversary with an
equally impressive line-up of presenters—**

both in New York and here in Paris. Our voices are heard around the world.

The American Bar Association always stands ready to assist your efforts and to show the world how a lawful and just society is essential to nurturing human rights. We have come a long way in 60 years. We have far to go, but I believe we can be hopeful that our awareness and needed work will only become stronger as the legal community and others continue to collaborate together.

**Merci bocoup for including the
American Bar Association here in
beautiful Parea.**