

7 November 2022

Michael Kirby elected Honorary Life Member of the IBA

The Law Council of Australia congratulates Michael Kirby AC CMG on being elected Honorary Life Member of International Bar Association (IBA) by the IBA Council at its meeting held in Miami on Thursday, 3 November 2022.

The IBA was established in 1947, and is the global voice of the legal profession, comprised of more than 80,000 individual international lawyers and 190 bar associations and law societies, spanning more than 170 countries. The IBA's objects include promoting the administration of justice under the rule of law among the peoples of the world. The IBA also assists the global legal community and influences the development of international law reform.

“Michael Kirby joins a very select group of people throughout the world who hold the title of Honorary Life Member of the IBA,” Law Council of Australia President, Mr Tass Liveris said. “On the recommendation of the IBA Management Board, the IBA Council may elect as an Honorary Life Member any person who has made an outstanding and unique contribution to the work of the IBA. Mr Kirby’s achievements and service to the legal profession and the community, both here in Australia and internationally are immense. He is only the second Australian to be elected as an Honorary Life Member of the IBA, after Nicholas Cowdery AO KC.

“Mr Kirby has been a member of the IBA since 1978 and has served as a member of its Human Rights Institute (HRI) since 2015, including as Co-Chair between 2018 and 2021.

“He is an international jurist, educator and former Judge of the Federal Court of Australia and Justice of the High Court of Australia. In 2009, upon his retirement from the High Court, Mr Kirby was made an honorary member of the Law Council of Australia, in recognition of his contribution to law, academia and the community, having demonstrated over his career an unwavering commitment to human rights, the rule of law and social justice.

“Mr Kirby was Chairman of the Australian Law Reform Commission, served as a Deputy President of the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission, and was President of the New South Wales Court of Appeal and the Court of Appeal of Solomon Islands.”

Mr Kirby has undertaken many international activities for the United Nations, the Commonwealth Secretariat, the OECD and the Global Fund Against AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. In 2011-12, he was Commissioner of the UNDP Global Commission on HIV and has served as a Member of the UN Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel on Access to Essential Healthcare.

In 1991, he was awarded the Australian Human Rights Medal. In 1998, he was named Laurette of the UNESCO Prize for Human Rights Education. In 2010, he was named co-winner of the Gruber Justice Prize. In 2011, he received the inaugural Australian Privacy Medal. He has been appointed Honorary Visiting Professor by 12 universities.

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Media Release



“Mr Kirby is a strong advocate of LGBTIQ rights and in April 2019 he co-headed a mission to the Holy See in Rome concerning repeal of worldwide criminal laws against the LGBTIQ community,” Mr Liveris said.

“Mr Kirby has made a remarkable achievement to the IBA over more than 40 years, particularly in working with the international legal community to promote and protect human rights and the independence of the legal profession across the world. On behalf of the Australian legal profession, I congratulate Mr Kirby on this well-deserved honour.”

Upon receiving the title of Honorary Life Member, Mr Kirby said: “The IBA is a great institution of worldwide membership. It undertakes outstanding work to support the activities of the legal profession worldwide. Universal human rights are inescapably a major focus of the IBA. They help to remind lawyers of the ultimate responsibility of our profession to protect and defend the rights of individuals, wherever they come under attack. They make us proud to be lawyers.” Mr Kirby hopes to be of future support to the IBA HRI, especially in the Asia-Pacific region.

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