FOREWORD

This textbook is an updated English translation of my German *Einführung in das internationale Menschenrechtssystem*, published in September 2002 by the Neuer Wissenschaftlicher Verlag in Vienna. It was inspired by numerous discussions with law students and people I trained for human rights field missions. They generally agreed that the revolutionary developments in international human rights protection called for a textbook that was not too expansive, but still included both traditional human rights protection and modern trends, covering theory and practice, legal foundations and multidisciplinary aspects of human rights alike. To be consistent the book was to be written by one person and was also to address readers without legal background or human rights experience. It was to serve as a first introduction and a kind of red thread in the increasingly incomprehensible thicket of international human rights. Clearly one book alone cannot meet such high expectations. Whether or not my efforts have been worthwhile is for readers to decide and I gladly welcome any constructive criticism they may have.

In chapters I to 3, I shall attempt to give an introduction to the significance, history and framework of human rights and the legal dogmatics behind them. Following this, in chapters 4 to 10 I shall present the main bodies and procedures of human rights protection with the United Nations, the Council of Europe and other regional organizations, including the role of non-governmental organizations in chapter 11. I then venture to analyze (chapter 12) and review these critically (chapter 13). Major developments of recent years, such as measures for the prevention of human rights violations, the trend towards individual criminal responsibility, the shift of activities to the ‘field’, and the new role of human rights in maintaining world peace and international security are discussed and illustrated by case studies in chapters 14 to 16. As expected, the book ends with my personal reflections on the central challenges for the future of human rights protection.

I refrained from using footnotes and instead limited myself to internal references identified in parenthesis; at the end of each chapter there is a list of selected literature and relevant Internet links. I kept the text brief and simple to maintain the character of a first introduction, but I added a number of ‘textboxes’, ‘lit boxes’ and ‘case boxes’ to fulfil various roles throughout the book (all data as of May 2003, unless otherwise indicated):

- To draw the attention to important facts and issues
- To quote relevant normative principles and other original texts
- To illustrate structures and procedures
- To summarize the main facts of case studies
- To present statistics and tables
- To make bibliographical references
- To be used as overhead transparencies or similar tools for instruction

I tried to complement each of the chapters and subchapters 1 to 5 – on the theoretical background, the United Nations and the Council of Europe as the two main
international organizations – with its own ‘text box’ as a sort of eye catcher. In chapters 6 to 16, I chose to present two different yet complementary approaches for each context. Again I tried to be brief in my general overview. Instead of subchapters I used boxes, each with its own structure. For specific information on the Inter-American Human Rights Commission, for example, one just needs to look up the opposite textbox (6.4.1.). To find out more about the significance of the Commission in the overall context of human rights protection with the OAS, there is the introduction to chapter 6.

The extensive ‘case boxes’ in chapters 14 to 16 are used to present concrete cases of preventive measures, application of international criminal law, humanitarian interventions and modern field operations in their context and all their complexity. I have added them, hoping not to confuse readers, but rather to give a more profound understanding of this highly complex matter.

This textbook would not have been possible without the support of many different individuals and institutions. Above all I would like to thank the staff of the Ludwig-Boltzmann-Institute of Human Rights at the University of Vienna who helped me prepare the ‘boxes’ and gave the necessary comments to make me reflect upon and improve the substance of my book. Tanja Vospernik was there from the very beginning to take care of the content and organizational issues. She prepared numerous overhead transparencies for my lectures in English and in German and many of the ‘boxes’ in the book are based on her work. During the final stages of the German version, Helmut Sax took over the main responsibility for reviewing, amending and revising the entire manuscript, the ‘boxes’, and the structure of the textbook. Both have been working for the institute for many years as legal researchers and I would like to thank them for their untiring commitment, their patience, competence, insistence and above all for the many scientific discussions we had in the course of the project. I also received many incentives and critical feedback from Walter Suntinger and Ursula Kriebaum who I prepared my lectures with.

During the early stages of the project, Renate Frech, Sandra Horina, Julia Savage and David Dorrans, amongst others, contributed towards preparing the ‘boxes’, while Stefan Maier, Martin Reichardt and Severin Strohal did an excellent job in correcting and editing the German text during the final stages. I would like to thank all of them for their valuable, competent and very often voluntary support.

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Finally, I would like to thank all the students whose discerning remarks initiated this book in the first place. I want to encourage them to be critical of this compilation of my efforts too. At any rate, I do hope the book will not only provide a first introduction to this fairly new multidisciplinary field for students of all faculties, but will also prove useful to those working in the ‘field’ and in other areas of international human rights protection. My aspiration is to give insight into a complex and fascinating phenomenon, which has revolutionized international relations in the course of more than half a century and has since come to provide the normative framework for a future ‘world order’.

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