

BARBARA J. GISLASON'S¹ HISTORIC TRIP TO ALGERIA

While at a United Nations Bar Briefing in New York in May 2016, two Algerian Bar Associations jointly invited me to visit Algeria. The request was extended to me through Ahmed Benantar, the President of the Union Internationale des Avocats (UIA) National Committee, on behalf of the Bar Association of Algiers (Barreau d'Alger), founded in 1848, and the Boumerdes Bar Association (Barreau de Boumerdes), more recently formed.

In preparing for the trip, I sought guidance from my hosts with regard to the subject of greatest interest to Algerian lawyers and judges and accordingly, my presentations were focused on the American legal system, with particular emphasis on the judicial system. Both lectures and Q&A lasted about five hours.

Although the Algerian leaders told me in advance of my journey about the significance of my lectures, I failed to fully appreciate the historic nature of them until I met with high profile and well-respected career diplomat, Ambassador Joan A. Polaschik, at the U.S. Embassy in Algiers. She impressed upon me the uniqueness and importance of this invitation. I was soon to learn that I was the first American ever invited to make a presentation to either the Barreau d'Alger or the Barreau de Boumerdes.

Both bar associations, comprised of lawyers and judges, were very warm, polite, and attentive to my presentations; the legal subject they were most interested in learning more about

¹ Barbara J. Gislason and the Honorable Jack Tunheim were the recipients of the 2016 Fellows Outstanding State Chair Award from the American Bar Foundation. Gislason also serves on the American Bar Association Section of Intellectual Property Law Council (ABA-IPL). She is the President of the Biotechnology Law Commission and U.S. National Committee for the Paris-based Union Internationale des Avocats (UIA). Through her efforts, prominent U.S. lawyers and judges have spoken at international UIA congresses and seminars in the past three years. They include: the Honorable Bernice Donald; the Honorable Cara Lee Neville; the Honorable Peter M. Reyes, Jr.; Paulette Brown; William Hubbard; James Silkenat; Laurel Bellows; Ted Davis; Donna Suchy; Jan Mulligan; Louise Bjorkman; Randy Aliment; and Jerome Roth. To join the UIA, go to: <http://www.uianet.org/en>.

was biotechnology law. The lawyers and judges in Algeria asked challenging and well-articulated questions. A few expressed surprise about the similarities in our legal systems. Algeria, for example, utilizes jury trials for serious crimes. I noticed that the lawyers I met there seemed to have a moral axis. There was, for example, interest in abolishing the death penalty.

In addition to legal questions, there were questions about whether I felt safe visiting the country and about race relations in the United States. In answering the questions posed, I emphasized that the views I expressed reflected my personal, rather than an institutional, opinion.

Following my presentations, I received praise for both my sincere attitude and for explaining the American legal system so clearly. It is difficult to describe how honored I felt to be taken in to the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria with open arms, not only for these formal presentations, but to observe scenic places along the Mediterranean. I also had the opportunity to visit Algeria's El-Moudjahid National Museum, which stands atop Hamma Hill at the site of a consequential meeting. Algeria gained her independence from France in 1962.

Not only is Algeria the largest country in Africa, but also, the tenth largest country in the world. The Algerian people are predominantly Muslim and descendants of the Berbers; the influences of the Roman and Ottoman empires are visually apparent. Algeria is known for its oil and natural gas resources and for being a member of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). More than 50% of the lawyers practicing in the country are female. The president of an Algerian women's lawyer organization was proud to tell me that domestic abuse against women is now a criminal offense.

Algeria is a member of the United Nations and its National Committee is active in the Paris-based Union Internationale des Avocats (UIA). The country joined the World Intellectual

Property Organization (WIPO) in 1975, follows patent cooperation treaty (PCT) procedures, and is a contracting party with the Berne Convention and the Madrid Protocol. It is my belief that this will be my first of many trips to Algeria and I look forward to using my best efforts to improve U.S. relations with this fine country.