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## In Memoriam: M. Cherif Bassiouni

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## **IN MEMORIAM: M. CHERIF BASSIOUNI**

*Leonard L. Cavise\**

Elsewhere in this memorial tome, the reader will find detailed descriptions of Cherif's many international contributions as a leading voice in international organizations united around questions of due process and freedom for the oppressed. From the Chairmanship of the Drafting Committee of the International Criminal Code to his leadership in the international community of scholars, others will write of his prodigious legacy. As a former faculty colleague of Cherif's at the DePaul College of Law, I have chosen to write of Cherif's accomplishments at DePaul, his home base for over 40 years.

Cherif was named a Professor of Law at the law faculty in 1964. He was given the honorific titles of Distinguished Research Professor in 2002 and Professor of Law Emeritus in 2009. He was given the DePaul Via Sapientiae award, the highest award available to honor faculty "who have made distinctive and extraordinary contributions to the University throughout their professional lives." To continue speaking solely of DePaul's recognition of Cherif's work, he received various distinguished service awards, the humanitarian award, faculty service award, the "Spirit of DePaul" award, and the excellence in scholarship awards. He was University Marshall for five years and a member of several very select committees, including Dean's selection, special events, and curriculum committees.

At the law school, Cherif will perhaps be best remembered as a co-founder and, subsequently, President of the school's International Human Rights Law Institute. In that capacity, he raised over \$20 million for the Institute's work, establishing important projects in Latin America, Central and Eastern Europe, and the Middle East, including an important rehabilitative project in Iraq beginning in 2003. The Institute was a singular presence at the College of Law, with foreign jurists and law students coming to DePaul on a regular basis to either learn the American trial system or simply to increase appreciation in the United States for the various legal systems of the world. Cherif made certain that our visitors had access to our foremost authorities in various disciplines. He made sure that his classes also met with our guests so that generations of DePaul students would have an international and human rights perspective unavailable at the time in practically any other U.S. law school. European scholars and jurists also made it a point to put DePaul on their itineraries not only to meet with Cherif (who would immediately cajole them into taking on positions of responsibility in the AIDP) but also to take advantage of DePaul's international profile and myriad resources. Several eminent European friends even today recall their "fellowship" or "intern" days at DePaul, always under the sponsorship of Cherif.

Everyone at DePaul will also remember Cherif's work as the Special Rapporteur for War Crimes in the former Yugoslavia. The "command room" for the investigations conducted by Cherif and his staff was on the eighth floor of the College of Law, where thousands of sensitive files, videotapes, and court documents were kept under lock and key for use in the tribunal. The energy

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with which Cherif approached this great responsibility was remarkable. To supervise the investigation would, in itself, be enough. Somehow, Cherif managed to travel widely in search of evidence and to inform the world of the atrocities he had documented and, at the same time, he ran the Institute, taught his classes, raised the money and eventually pursued the prosecution of a large number of war criminals, perhaps the largest and most significant since the Nuremberg trials.

Others will speak here of the war crimes investigations, just as others will write of his undying allegiance to his beloved Siracusa Institute and its programs of experts from around the world. Many at DePaul were able to share in the work of the investigations and of the Institute. Cherif facilitated the involvement of many of us in his work. For most at DePaul, it was their first exposure to international work and, for many, it had a lifetime, transformative effect.

Though Cherif's scholarship has been discussed and analyzed by many, it is perhaps worth repeating that, while Cherif was at DePaul, he wrote most of those 24 books and his 256 articles. Many of those works were written in one of the four languages in which Cherif was fluent. Many others were translated into a score of other languages. Whether he was writing about Sharia or Arabic law, comparative criminal procedure, the rights of the extradited, torture, substantive criminal law or any number of historical works, Cherif's body of work can certainly be described as encyclopedic. Perhaps more than any other scholar in international criminal law and procedure, Cherif was a master analyst and synthesizer. He wrote as he spoke: thoroughly, structurally flawlessly, articulately. Regardless of his U.N. obligations, his role as a leader in the non-governmental organization community, or his regular administrative and teaching duties, scholarship and the advancement of both theoretical and practical understanding was always high on his daily agenda, including weekends when Cherif would "relax" by writing.

Not to be overlooked is Cherif's role as a litigator and consultant. Cited in hundreds of legal opinions and thousands of legal journals, it was only natural that Cherif would be sought out both for his advice but also for his actual representation in various sorts of lawsuits, particularly when he thought he could help the Arab community in Chicago.

As a law professor, Cherif taught literally thousands of students in a wide variety of courses at DePaul. He often picked his best students to help him in one of his projects *du jour*. It would be nearly impossible to estimate how many DePaul law students served as research assistants to Cherif and, consequently, used him as an inspiration to continue international human rights work.

On perhaps a less professional and more personal note, I also recall Cherif fondly as an entertainer. I remember many a night in the salon of the Villa Politi in Siracusa when Cherif would gather a number of the dignitaries around him from a handful of countries and entertain them all with his stories from the trenches. I particularly recall his joke-telling abilities. He could tell jokes with a true comedian's sense of timing in four languages and then translate for anyone who couldn't follow along. Always at the center of attention and always worthy of the intense focus, Cherif Bassiouni was a leader in every sense of the word.

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Editor's Note: This article is adapted from [M. Cherif Bassiouni \(1937-2017\) Cherif's Friends. In Memoriam. Presented in the occasion of the naming of the M. CHERIF BASSIOUNI CENTRE.](#)