

Dr. Carlos Martín Beristain, MD, Spanish physician and psychologist, and Dr. Arancha García del Soto, Ph.D., of the Institute of International Humanitarian Affairs at Fordham University, presented at the February 23, 2007 *Conversations at Lunch* sponsored by the Center for Human Rights and International Justice. More than twenty faculty and students from the Boston College community and greater Boston area attended the event.

Dr. Beristain teaches in the masters program in International Humanitarian Assistance at the Pedro Arrupe Institute of Human Rights at the University of Deusto, Bilbao, Spain. He has also recently published in English his book, *Humanitarian Aid Work: A Critical Approach*. Dr. García del Soto, a psychologist and sociologist, is Director of Refugee Initiatives at the Solomon Asch Center for the Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict at the University of Pennsylvania. She is also the Helen Hamlyn Senior Fellow at the Institute of International Humanitarian Affairs at Fordham University.

Drs. Beristain and García del Soto presented on the nature of reparations after mass atrocity and the issues that they have encountered in this area during their many years of field experience. Dr. García del Soto began by discussing three recurring themes in the area of reparations. The first is the nature of reparations: economic, social, and communal. She noted that there is a great divide between those who favor monetary reparations and those who favor symbolic reparations. This discussion led to the second theme: deciding the size of economic reparations. Dr. García del Soto noted that reparations may be based on culture, and some cultures favor economic over symbolic reparations. The third theme focused on the needs of the victims and how they view reparations.

Dr. Beristain carried the discussion forward on three main topics: the process of elaborating a psychosocial evaluation of the impact of the human rights violations on victims, preparation of victims for the process of telling their story, and the impact of the reparations. Dr. Beristain gave three arguments for the importance of evaluating the impact of atrocities on victims. First, there is a need to support the victims as they seek justice. Second, victims contribute to the articulation of the legal violation that has occurred and because of the psychological impact of the violations against them, victims may need extra assistance in participating in legal proceedings. Finally, determining the impact of the damage resulting from human rights abuses may make it easier to articulate what form the reparations should take. He also noted that it is important to include both individual and collective damage in assessing the impact of mass atrocity on victims.

Frequently, the psychosocial evaluations are the first times that victims are able to discuss what happened to them during a campaign of political terror. Given the infrequency of victims' opportunity for testimony regarding human rights abuses it is important that they receive assistance in preparing themselves for a public presentation in front of a court or other judicial body. Through the story-telling process, Dr. Beristain said, many victims have the damage done to them validated.

Dr. Beristain also presented facts on the impact that reparations have on societies devastated by mass human rights violations. In order for these processes to be reparatory,

it is important both to know what the victims expect and to provide reparations that interface with what the victims want. A balance among the various aspects of reparations is related to the symbolic value the reparation has for the individual; some people want justice, not money. Citing various examples of reparations that were implemented in ways that detracted from their reparatory value, Dr. Beristain demonstrated that the ways in which reparations are implemented is as important as what reparations are awarded.