

“Challenges to the Absolute Prohibition of Torture”

Lecture by Dr. Manfred Novak
WEBSTER University Vienna campus

by Julijana Bojanic

Manfred Novak is a an Austrian human rights lawyer, professor at the Vienna University, and co-director of the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights. In addition, Novak was one of the judges of the Human Rights Chamber for Bosnia and Herzegovina between March 1996 and December 2003.

As a part Year of International Human Rights events, the Webster University Vienna campus, hosted a Dec. 3 guest lecture by Dr. Manfred Novak, special rapporteur on torture of the UN Human Rights Commission.

The attentive and very interactive audience was made up in large part of Webster students.

Novak’s insightful presentation about the “Challenges to the Absolute Prohibition of Torture” departed from the basic definition of human rights violations by offering a different set of methodologies. Novak discussed the historical development of legal instruments against torture, from WWII onwards. Using a wide range of case studies of human rights violations and torture, he supported his notion that the situation in some parts of the world is genuinely critical and that the challenges are many.

Novak sees impunity as one of the biggest obstacles to the prevention of torture, along with a paradigm shift, such as the war on terror, triggered by September 11, or the Daschner case in Germany, where the absolute prohibition of torture was put in question. From his perspective, one of the mechanisms to effectively counter and prevent the torture, is to strengthen the international legal system and enforce the international monitoring against torture.

