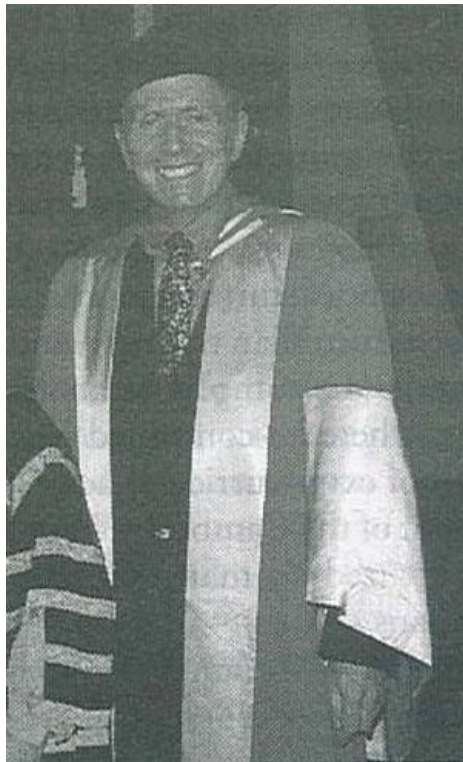


Justice Michael Donald Kirby AC CMG



The degree of Doctor of Laws (honoris causa) was conferred upon Justice Michael Donald Kirby AC CMG at the ceremony held at 11.30am on 4 May 1996.



Justice Michael Kirby, *photo, Tracey Schramm, 'The University of Sydney New', November 1999, University of Sydney Archives.*

Citation

Presented by the Vice-Chancellor and Principal Professor D J Anderson

Chancellor,

I have the honour to present Justice Michael Kirby AC CMG for admission to the degree of Doctor of Laws (honoris causa).

In 1849 William Charles Wentworth proposed a Bill to incorporate and endow the University of Sydney - to promote the enlightenment of the mind, the refinement of understanding and the elevation of the citizenry. From the University he predicted would come a long line of illustrious names. Justice Michael Kirby, whom we honour today, is one of that illustrious line.

To enlighten his mind he took Bachelor Degrees in Arts, Law and Economics, and a first-class-honours Masters Degree in Law. To refine his understanding of people and to develop his capacity for intellectual and moral leadership, he served time in the Students Representative Council and the University Union, and served as President of both.

The students recognised his qualities and elected him to represent them on the University Senate from 1964 to 1969, and a very good Senate member he was. He has maintained his links with the University of Sydney as Chairman of the Advisory Committee of the Institute of Criminology, was Deputy Chancellor of the University of Newcastle from 1976 to 1983, and Chancellor of Macquarie University from 1984 until 1993.

He decided to make his profession the law, and between 1962 and 1974 he practiced first as a solicitor and then as a barrister in NSW. Then, in 1975, he became Deputy President of the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission - and, more significantly, Foundation Chairman of the Law Reform Commission.

There, to a notable degree, he raised public awareness of the critical issues of law and justice in Australian society and stimulated informed debate, particularly in the field of human rights. The award of the Australian Human Rights Medal in 1991 recognised his work on the Law Reform Commission, on the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs, and on the AIDS Trust of Australia.

Some idea of his attitude to the role of the law and lawyers came through his address to Law Graduates in this Great Hall in 1990. He then spoke of the ultimate obligation of a University person to serve the community, to right wrongs, to shine the light of knowledge, and to share our insights with others.

When the young Michael Kirby was asked what he would like to be when he grew up, he replied "a bishop or a judge". The child was truly father of the man. He decided later that he was not pious enough to be a Bishop, but in 1983 at the age of 44 he became a Judge of the Federal Court, a year later he became a Judge of the Supreme Court of NSW and President of the Court of Appeal. He remained in that position until earlier this year when he was appointed to the High Court of Australia.

His publications and activities have made him known internationally. From 1978 to 1980 he was Chairman of OECD's Government Group on International Data Flows, and, since 1991, Chairman of their Expert Group on The Security of Information Systems. He was Chairman of the UNESCO Expert Group on the Rights of People in 1985, a member of WHO's Global Commission on AIDS from 1989 to 1991, and President of the International Commission of Jurists from 1995. In September 1995 he was appointed to the Ethical, Legal and Social Issues Committee of the Human Genome Organisation in the United States which monitors the greatest ever co-operative scientific project.

Michael Kirby's entry in Who's Who gives "work" as his sole recreation - but that entry is a slight, though pardonable exaggeration. He was on the Council of the Australian Opera Trust from 1983 until 1989, and is known to have a liking for Gilbert & Sullivan. There is a passage in Iolanthe which, with a slight emendation, may end this citation:

The law is the true embodiment
Of everything that's excellent.
It has no kind of fault or flaw,
That I, my Lords, do not deplore.

Chancellor, I have the honour to present Justice Michael Kirby for admission to the degree of Doctor of Laws (honoris causa).