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**NEW CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF REFUGEE LAWYERS LAUNCHED,  
VOW TO DEFEND RIGHTS OF ASYLUM SEEKERS**

**TORONTO** – Over 150 lawyers and academics gathered in Toronto and online via satellite locations throughout Canada last Friday September 9, to launch the Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers (CARL). In Ottawa alone, approximately 20 Ottawa refugee lawyers participated the inaugural meeting using video conference facilities at Ottawa University’s Human Rights Research and Education Centre.

Relying on the broad expertise of its members, the new association will serve as an informed national voice on refugee law and human rights, and promote just and consistent practices in the treatment of refugees across Canada. Subsequent to the inaugural meeting, a local Ottawa chapter of CARL has also been formed.

CARL was formed as a response to concerns about the past and present treatment of refugees by the Canadian government. In particular, CARL will vigorously oppose the forthcoming passage of Bill C-4 which would allow the government to detain and imprison people seeking refugee status.

The Association also plans to speak out about the small but serious ways in which the government is reforming the new refugee claim system. The new system was initially scheduled to be implemented on December 1 of this year, but has recently been postponed until June 29, 2012. As with the government’s criminal law omnibus legislation, CARL is concerned the government will employ its parliamentary majority to pass the legislation without regard to sociological or legal evidence.

Lorne Waldman, a prominent Toronto Immigration lawyer and newly elected president of CARL, stated that the new group will act as a strong counter balance to both the recent treatment of asylum seekers, and current policy trends seeking to limit refugee rights in Canada.

“The treatment of detained refugee claimants on the West Coast and arbitrary detention proposed in recent government legislation (Bill C-4) were a call to arms for all those concerned about basic principles of justice,” he said. “More than ever, lawyers and academics across Canada must coordinate their efforts to protect human rights, preserve the Charter, and defend asylum seekers.”

CARL will intervene, organize and disseminate legal research on refugee and asylum issues in a range of ways including:

- Interventions before the courts on refugee issues of broad national interest;
- Submissions to parliamentary committees on government legislation and policy;
- Public outreach and education on major issues in refugee law and policy;
- Legal support for refugee counsel across Canada;
- The promotion of socio-legal scholarship on refugee law and other areas of law impacting on the human rights of migrants.

Mitchell Goldberg, a Montreal immigration lawyer elected vice-president of the association, underlined CARL’s determination to speak out when basic human rights were threatened.

“CARL will not remain silent while the government imposes punitive measures against refugees. This is a slippery slope that violates the rule of law as well as Canada’s humanitarian traditions,” he stated.

Mr. Goldberg added that CARL does not intend to replace other important and respected national organizations, such as the Canadian Council of Refugees and the Canadian Bar Association, but seeks rather to provide a prompt and focused response in the courts and in the public forum.

For more information, or to Contact CARL:

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