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## NGO Update

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## NGO UPDATE

*To foster communication among human rights organizations around the world, each issue of the Human Rights Brief features an "NGO Update." This space was created to aid non-governmental organizations (NGOs) by informing others about their programs, successes, and challenges. The views of the organizations below do not necessarily reflect those of the Human Rights Brief. For information on how to submit updates for your organization, please see the instructions provided at the end of this column.*

### WITNESS

[www.witness.org](http://www.witness.org)

WITNESS is a nonprofit organization based in Brooklyn, New York, that uses video to raise awareness of human rights abuses around the world. It was founded in 1992 by musician and activist Peter Gabriel and the Reebok Foundation for Human Rights as a project of the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights (now Human Rights First). WITNESS partners with local organizations and human rights defenders to assist them in documenting human rights violations and transforming personal stories of abuse into "powerful tools of justice." In so doing, it aims to bring otherwise unseen images, untold stories, and seldom heard voices to the attention of decision makers, the media, and the general public. Over the past decade, WITNESS has partnered with more than 200 groups in 50 countries.

WITNESS partner footage has appeared on television networks around the world, including CNN, ABC, CBS, PBS, and BBC. Satellite networks and film distribution companies also carry WITNESS' partner films and videos, which have been shown at film festivals worldwide. The group also recently released "Living Proof: The Right to Live in the Community" with its Croatian partner, Association for Promoting Inclusion (API). This film documents a groundbreaking initiative to provide alternatives to institutional confinement for

Croatians with intellectual disabilities. In addition, WITNESS frequently holds screenings of its films for members of Congress and state legislatures. WITNESS and Human Rights Focus (HURIFO) co-produced a new film entitled "Between Two Fires: Torture and Displacement in Northern Uganda." This film documents the nearly two million individuals that have been displaced in Northern Uganda as a result of the country's long-running civil war.

### INDIAN LAW RESOURCE CENTER

[www.indianlaw.org](http://www.indianlaw.org)

The Indian Law Resource Center (Center) is a nonprofit law and advocacy organization established and directed by American Indians. The Center provides legal assistance to Indian and Alaska Native nations in the United States, Canada, and Central and South America to protect their human rights, as well as their land, resources, environment, and cultural heritage. The Center seeks to overcome the devastating problems threatening American Natives by advancing the rule of law and establishing national and international legal standards that preserve their human rights and dignity.

The Indian Law Resource Center was one of the lead advocates and consulting organizations to assist the UN Working Group on the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in December 2005. Additionally, after more than seven years of advocacy, communications, and petitions between the Indian Law Resource Center and the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), as well as others, CERD issued a decision under its Early Warning and Urgent Action Procedure urging the United States government to "freeze," "desist from," and "stop" actions or threatened actions against the Western Shoshone peoples. This decision marks the first time a United Nations body has issued a decision condemning the U.S. for its current legal and political actions concerning Native Americans. The decision is also significant as precedent for the UN's examination of situations faced by other indigenous peoples.

### INSTITUTO SOCIOAMBIENTAL (ISA)

[www.socioambiental.org](http://www.socioambiental.org)

The Instituto Socioambiental (ISA) was established in 1994 to defend environmental, social, and cultural rights in Brazil. ISA is the only NGO in Brazil that has a legal department dedicated entirely to the defense of socio-environmental rights. ISA's programs promote socio-environmental sustainability, as well as cultural and biological diversity, through law and public policy.

ISA's Socio-Environmental Law Program is coordinated by attorneys working for the implementation of socio-environmental rights guaranteed by Brazilian law. These attorneys bring claims in Brazilian courts, discuss and formulate new legal concepts, and help civil society solve conflicts with the goal of increasing public awareness around socio-environmental rights. ISA's Public Policy Program works hand-in-hand with its legal department and partners with various government agencies that define and carry out policies related to socio-environmental rights. ISA's biodiversity programs focus on providing technical assistance to indigenous partner organizations faced with threats to biodiversity such as over-exploitation of fisheries, logging interests, and gold mining.

### ASIAN AMERICAN JUSTICE CENTER (AAJC)

[www.advancingequality.org](http://www.advancingequality.org)

The Asian American Justice Center (AAJC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, which was incorporated in 1991 and opened its Washington, D.C., office in 1993. AAJC works to advance the human rights of Asian Americans through advocacy, public policy, public education, and litigation. AAJC seeks to promote civic engagement, forge strong and safe communities, and create inclusive communities at a local, regional, and national level. A nationally recognized organization working on behalf of Asian American communities, AAJC focuses its expertise on affirmative action, anti-Asian violence prevention, race relations, immigrant rights, language access, and voting rights.

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velopment of an international “crime against democracy.” His analysis and conclusions were subsequently included in the book *Protecting Democracy: International Response*, published by Lexington Press in February 2005. His pending publications include a paper that he presented at a workshop on crimes against humanity convened at

the Oñati International Institute for the Sociology of Law in Bilbao, Spain, entitled “Ending Impunity in the Americas: Role of the Inter-American Human Rights System in Advancing Accountability for Serious Crimes under International Law.” It is forthcoming in Southwestern University’s *Journal of Law and Trade in the Americas*.

Mr. Tittmore credits WCL for many of his career opportunities in international human rights and humanitarian law. “The faculty members at WCL are among the finest in the world,” he notes. “They challenged me to be exacting and rigorous in my legal work and at the same time encouraged me to push the boundaries, to

play a role in shaping the law and advancing the humanitarian values that lie at the foundation of our work. You can’t ask for more than that from a legal education.” **HRB**

*Emily Wann, a J.D. candidate at the Washington College of Law, covers the Alumni Profile for the Human Rights Brief.*

#### NGO UPDATE: *continued from page 70*

After the hurricanes along the Gulf Coast in August and September of 2005, AAJC forged ties with and advocated on behalf of Asian communities affected by the storms, many of which are now displaced. Louisiana alone was home to more than 60,000 Asian Americans, more than half of which were Vietnamese. Most of these individuals were refugees and some were undocumented immigrants. In response AAJC has provided

a resource page on its website for Asian Americans affected by the hurricanes, helped connect these Asian communities with local legal resources, and written several reports on the situation of these affected communities, which it has shared with law firms and attorneys working along the Gulf Coast.

*The Human Rights Brief is accepting submissions for the next edition of “NGO Update.” If your organization has an event or situation it*

*would like to publicize, please send a short description to hrbrief@wcl.american.edu and include “NGO Update” in the subject heading of the message. Please limit your submission to two paragraphs. The Human Rights Brief reserves the right to edit for content and space limitations.* **HRB**

*Lauren Bartlett, a J.D. candidate at the Washington College of Law, covers NGOs for the Human Rights Brief.*

#### CENTER NEWS/FACULTY AND STAFF UPDATES: *continued from page 76*

interviewed by *Media Matters* on electronic surveillance and FISA and by *Japanese News Service* on the Supreme Court. He also participated in a documentary on the Supreme Court for PBS. In February Professor Schwartz lectured on Human Rights in Legal Education for Syrian law professors and presented at the New Israel Fund Forum in New York on “Israel as a Jewish and Democratic State.”

**Rick Wilson**, Professor of Law at WCL and Co-Director of the Center, served as detailed defense co-counsel representing Omar Khadr, a Canadian citizen charged with alleged war crimes in Afghanistan in *United States v. Khadr* before a U.S. military commission in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. He co-edited *International Human Rights & Humanitarian Law: Treaties, Cases & Analysis* with Francisco Forrest Martin,

Stephen J. Schnably, Jonathan S. Simon, and Mark V. Tushnet. Professor Wilson also served as a commentator for a presentation by Aryeh Neier, Director of the Open Society Justice Initiative, on economic, social, and cultural rights at WCL. Professor Wilson and Muneer Ahmad co-authored an editorial in the *Toronto Star*, “Canada: The Time to Speak on Khadr is Now,” in January. Professor Wilson was interviewed by a Texas Lawyer regarding a profile of two lawyers from Texas defending cases at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. He was a panelist on “Military Commissions and the Status of Fair Trial Norms” at Amnesty International Lawyers’ Conference, “Fulfilling the Legacy: International Justice 60 Years After Nuremberg,” in Seattle, Washington. In February Professor Wilson was the closing speaker on “Forty Acres and a Mule: Is

Property More Important than Happiness?” at the Conference on Poverty and Human Rights sponsored by the International Law Society and National Lawyers’ Guild at George Washington University School of Law. He was interviewed by RadioFrance on the legal situation in Guantánamo Bay and by CanWest about the UN’s report on conditions at Guantánamo, which called for the closing of the U.S. prison, and its impact on the *Khadr* case. He was a panelist at “The Inter-American System’s Legal Framework on Torture,” a Training Seminar on the UN and Regional Systems’ Legal Framework on Torture, held at WCL on March 3, 2006. He was an invited expert at the “Working Group Review of Draft Legal Education Reform Index,” organized by the American Bar Association CEELI, in Washington, D.C., on February 28, 2006. **HRB**

#### UNITED NATIONS UPDATE: *continued from page 60*

ent context, a key question is how the court will assess the burden of proof. Genocide is typically addressed in a criminal court, which carries a much higher burden of proof than civil courts.

#### JUDGES ELECT FIRST FEMALE JUDGE AS PRESIDENT OF THE ICJ

On February 6, 2006, the ICJ elected Judge Rosalyn Higgins as President of the Court and Judge Awn Shawkat Al-Khasawneh as Vice-President, each for a term of three years. Judge Higgins of the

United Kingdom is the first female judge at the ICJ and the first to be elected President of the Court. Judge Al-Khasawneh is from Jordan. **HRB**

*Nicholas Leddy, a J.D. candidate at the Washington College of Law, covers the United Nations for the Human Rights Brief.*