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2007 NLADA Beacon of Justice Award Presented to Law Firms Providing Pro Bono Representation to Detainees at Guantanamo Bay

On Monday, June 12, 2007, at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Washington, DC, the National Legal Aid & Defender Association presented its Beacon of Justice Award to 58 law firms providing pro bono representation to detainees at Guantanamo Bay. Speakers and honorees included Leonard Noisette, Director, Neighborhood Defender Services, NYC, William C. McNeill III, Legal Aid Society of San Francisco, Dennis R. Murphy, Legal Aid Society, New York, Kenneth Frazier, Merck & Co., Esther Lardent, Pro Bono Institute, who presented the Beacon of Justice Award, and Roderick A. (Rick) Palmore, Sara Lee Corporation, who was the 2007 Corporate Exemplar Award winner. Mr. Palmore – the creator of "Call to Action," a program focused on addressing the retention, promotion and direction of business to the minority communities of the legal profession – was honored for his strong record of pro bono assistance, commitment to diversity and contributions to the health of the low-income community of Chicago.

Several corporate general counsel who spoke, including Rick Palmore and Kenneth Frazier, highlighted the contributions of the firms representing Guantanamo detainees and praised their courage and commitment to equal justice. As NLADA president and CEO Jo-Ann Wallace noted, limiting access to counsel jeopardizes a fair justice system. In response to criticism of the Guantanamo firms by a deputy assistant secretary at the Department of Defense, NLADA, the Association of Corporate Counsel, the American Bar Association, and others adopted resolutions expressing appreciation for those who provide pro bono legal services to disfavored individuals and groups. In her remarks, Esther Lardent also thanked the Center for Constitutional Rights, a small organization that has taken on the enormous task of training and coordinating those attorneys representing detainees.

Please see below a list of the firms honored and a transcript of Esther Lardent's speech at the event.

The firms being honored with the Beacon of Justice Award are both large and small with offices across the country. Firms to be honored include:

Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP
 Allen & Overy LLP
 Baker & McKenzie LLP
 Bingham McCutchen LLP
 Burke, McPheeters, Bordner, & Estes
 Burns & Levinson LLP
 Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton LLP
 Clifford Chance LLP
 Cohen, Milstein, Hausfeld & Toll, PLLC
 Covington & Burling
 Cowan Liebowitz & Latman PC
 Cravath, Swaine & Moore LLP
 Davis Wright Tremaine LLP
 Debevoise & Plimpton LLP
 Dechert LLP
 Dickstein Shapiro LLP
 Dorsey & Whitney LLP
 Downs Rachlin Martin PLLC
 Esdaile, Barrett & Esdaile

Foley Hoag LLP
Fredrikson & Byron, PA
Fulbright & Jaworski
Hangley, Aronchick, Segal & Pudlin
Harris Wiltshire & Grannis
Heller Ehrman
Holland & Hart LLP
Hunton & Williams
Jenner & Block LLP
Jones Day
Keller & Heckman LLP
Kilpatrick Stockton LLP
Kramer Levin Naftalis & Frankel LLP
Lesnevich and Marzano-Lesnevich
Lesser, Newman, Souweine & Nasser
Mayer, Brown, Rowe & Maw LLP
McCarter & English, LLP
Morrison & Foerster, LLP
Murphy & Shaffer
Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP
Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP
Pepper Hamilton LLP
Perkins Coie LLP
Rodgers, Powers & Schwartz LLP
Schiff Hardin LLP
Schnader Harrison Segal & Lewis LLP
Shearman & Sterling LLP
Shook Hardy & Bacon LLP
Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP
Spriggs & Hollingworth
Sutherland, Asbill & Brennan LLP
Tennant Lubell LLC
Trainor, Billman, Bennett, Milko & McCabe, LLP
Venable LLP
Weil, Gotshal & Manges LLP
Weinberg & Garber, PC
WilmerHale

Esther F. Lardent
Beacon of Justice Award Presentation Remarks

Thank you, Joanne, for those kind words.

I am honored tonight to present the Beacon of Justice award to the more than 50 leading firms whose courageous lawyers are providing pro bono representation to prisoners held in detention in Guantanamo bay.

I have the best legal job in the world – working with brilliant lawyers in major law firms and legal departments who, despite their already frantic schedules, make the time to provide pro bono service to the poor, the disadvantaged, and even, at times, the despised.

Reginald Heber Smith, the father of legal aid and legal services in the United States, wrote, in 1919, that “to withhold the equal protection of the laws is to undermine the entire structure and threaten it with collapse...to deny law or justice to any person is, in actual effect, to outlaw them by stripping them of their only protection. It is for such reasons that freedom and equality of justice are essential to a democracy and that denial of justice is the short cut to anarchy.” Those words ring true - perhaps even truer – today.

It is particularly fitting that NLADA honors these lawyers and their law firms tonight. NLADA’s members – legal services lawyers, public defenders, and their supporters in the private bar – fight for the rights of the accused and the powerless every day. And NLADA as an institution has for so many years fought for the independence of lawyers and judges, for the

preservation of habeas corpus, for the principle that the integrity of our system of justice requires – no, demands – that each of us has the right to counsel, to due process, to the rule of law...or soon none of us will have those rights.

These lawyers – the Guantanamo counsel – are the best of our profession. They deserve our gratitude and our esteem. Not everyone, however, has understood their profound contribution to our society and our nation.

[Videotape of Charles "Cully" Stimson, as deputy assistant secretary of defense for detainee affairs, saying "As a result of a FOIA request through a major news organization, somebody asked, 'Who are the lawyers around this country representing detainees down there?' And you know what, it's shocking. The major law firms in this country -- Pillsbury Winthrop, Jenner & Block, Wilmer Cutler Pickering, Covington & Burling here in D.C., Sutherland Asbill & Brennan, Paul Weiss Rifkin, Mayer Brown, Weil Gotshal, Pepper Hamilton, Venable, Alston & Bird, Perkins Coie, Hunton & Williams, Fulbright Jaworski, all the rest of them -- are out there representing detainees, and I think, quite honestly, when corporate CEOs see that those firms are representing the very terrorists who hit their bottom line back in 2001, those CEOs are going to make those law firms choose between representing terrorists or representing reputable firms, and I think that is going to have major play in the next few weeks. It's going to be fun to watch that play out."]

It has been fun to watch this play out!

We can't recognize each lawyer and each firm individually or we would be here all night, but I would like all of the Guantanamo counsel to stand and receive your applause. Please come forward afterwards for an award ceremony, photographs, and to meet each other in person.

At this time, when the most fundamental issues in our society are being debated, major law firms and legal departments are helping to address the need – not only for more pro bono but also for vitally important pro bono that may be more controversial. Thanks to all of you for speaking truth to power and for preserving the rule of law.

[PRINTER FRIENDLY VERSION]

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