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International Lawyers take stand on Forced Marriage

The International Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers, (www.iaml.org), confirms its commitment to combat the practice of Forced Marriage and to raise awareness of the incidence of Forced Marriage within the international family law community.

IAML Fellow, Anne-Marie Hutchinson presented at the 18th Commonwealth Law Conference in Cape Town, South Africa earlier this month urging the international legal community provide leadership in addressing the issue of Forced Marriage.

The practice of Forced Marriage is global. It is not restricted to any one state, community or religion. It is not a practice restricted to Third-World countries, or to any one area of the world. It is happening in towns and cities in Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

The practice of forcing a person, particularly a child, into marriage is a fundamental breach of human rights. The plight of young people who are subjected to such an ordeal is of concern to all who practice family law. Concomitant incidences of rape and honor killings are also a common consequence of the practice.

Many nations have, or are in the process of formulating legal responses to the practice of Forced Marriage to ensure that the practice ceases. Forced marriages occur within the dynamic of the family. The victims in almost every incidence love and trust the perpetrators -- their parents and close family. Victims may, therefore, be unwilling to

seek assistance and when they do seek assistance it can be very difficult to obtain due to conflicting laws and a lack of understanding of the problem.

It has been the willingness of the world-wide community to look the other way that has allowed this deplorable practice to spread and continue. We hope to begin the dialogue that will focus attention to this human rights violation.

The International Academy of Matrimonial lawyers will concentrate on development of victim-focused remedies in all jurisdictions through the following initiatives:

- (i) Civil legislation and a victim-focused use of family law practice;
- (ii) Education and awareness-raising worldwide;
- (iii) The continued commitment of IAML family law specialists to ensure that victims of this practice are provided assistance so as to be able to rebuild their lives;
- (iv) To support intentional standards and co-operation.

The IAML can connect interested media with Anne-Marie Hutchinson, or other experts who specialize in this area.

Contact William Longrigg or Nancy Zalusky Berg for more information.